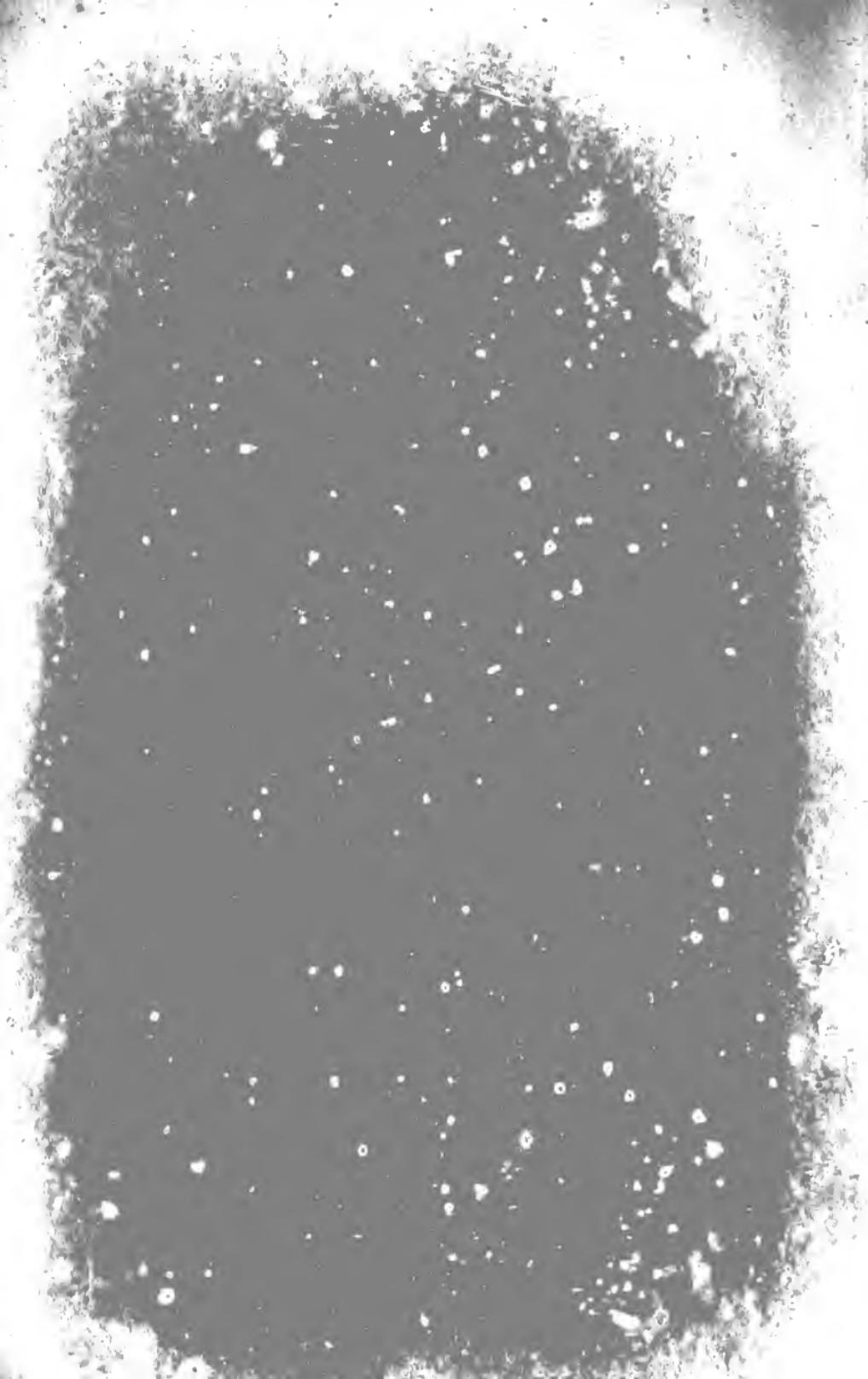




FRANK SINCLAIR'S WIFE,

AND

OTHER STORIES.



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AND OTHER STORIES.

BY

MRS. RIDDELL,

AUTHOR OF

“GEORGE GEITH,” “TOO MUCH ALONE,” “HOME, SWEET HOME,”
“THE EARL'S PROMISE,” ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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FRANK SINCLAIR'S WIFE.



FRANK SINCLAIR'S WIFE.

CHAPTER XXII.

“THE HOTEL.”

“It seemed to me better for the sheriff’s officer to drink wine than that Mr. Allington should in any way have the benefit of it. I feel more amiable towards Mr. Allington, though. Looking at the affair from his point of view, I admit he had reason for complaint.

“When I had finished my letters, one to my wife and another to her mother, entreating the latter to come up and nurse Susie, I told my visitor that one of my children was very ill, and requested his permis-

sion to go up-stairs and see her before my departure. 'Of course,' I added, 'you can accompany me.'

" 'Sir,' he replied, 'I am a father myself, and know a gentleman when I see him.'

" Having communicated which pieces of information, he stood up while I passed out of the room, and, instead of following me, devoted himself, as I have reason to believe, to the sherry decanter.

" Outside the dining-room door, I found another gentleman seated on one of the hall chairs. His hat, which contained a blue cotton handkerchief adorned with white spots, was placed between his feet, and he carried a knobbly stick whereon his chin rested contemplatively.

" 'Good evening, sir,' he said, touching a wisp of black hair which hung down his forehead just like the forelock of a horse's mane.

" For a moment or two he seemed doubtful as to whether or not it was his duty to

accompany me, but immediately after his chin dropped again on the top of his stick, and I was permitted to ascend the stairs alone.

“Whether I shall ever kiss my children again or not I cannot tell, but I shall never forget the feeling with which I bade them good night then.

“‘Don’t go, papa, dear,’ Susie cried, with her arms clasped tightly round my neck.

“‘There are two gentlemen waiting for me,’ I said, ‘and it is necessary for me to go out with them.’

“‘I hate strange gentlemen,’ exclaimed Susie, and she loosened her clasp and buried her face in the pillow, sobbing bitterly.

“‘Susie, love, for my sake,’ I entreated, for it was indeed more than I felt at the moment I could bear, and then the darling lifted her tear-stained face, and, trying to smile, looked more touching and pathetic than she had done in the access of her grief.

“Something in my tone must have touched her, for she said, ‘Susie will be good to-night, papa.’

“‘Try to be good to-night, and all nights, Susie,’ I answered—‘God bless you, my darling’—and then I drew the counterpane closely around her, smoothed the little pillow, kissed her once more, and left the room.

“The gentleman-in-waiting who had accompanied his friend to my house being good enough to take a seat beside the driver, Mr. Rustin (this I found was the name of the sheriff’s officer) and I were *tête-à-tête*.

“That I was indisposed for conversation seemed to be the very reason why he persisted in forcing his upon me, and my monosyllabic answers only appeared to rouse a talking fiend within him.

“All along the dull suburban streets, all the way through the more bustling thoroughfares, where he had to shout to make me

hear what he said, he rehearsed his experiences and expressed his opinions—returning at uncertain intervals to my position, and striving to induce me to reconsider that little matter about Whitecross Street.

“‘ You’ll excuse me, sir,’ he began shortly after we left Briant View Terrace, laying a marked emphasis on ‘ excuse,’ but most probably you are not acquainted with the Hotel.’

“‘ What hotel ?’ I asked.

“‘ Oh ! the Cripplegate—Whitecross Street Prison. That is how most likes to have their letters addressed—sometimes it is called by the governor’s name—but anyhow, as I was a saying, you have never put up there before, have you ?’

“‘ No,’ I replied, ‘ it is my first visit.’

“‘ And you have never been there to see a friend ?’

“‘ Never,’ I answered.

“‘ Then, sir, take my advice, and let us go quietly and comfortably to Sloman’s. It

may cost a little more money, but you will find it worth all the difference. You have no idea what poor sort of accommodation there is at the Hotel. A gentleman like you could not stomach it, I am sure. Of course, it is in one way no concern of mine ; but it would not be right for me after the handsome manner in which you acted, to let you go to such a place in ignorance. The Hotel is just the filthiest and the blackguardest place in London. There, I would not wish my worst enemy, if I had one, a night in it.' Having delivered himself of which sentiment, this Christian, who was at peace with all the world, waited to hear what effect his eloquence had produced upon me.

“‘I shall go to Whitecross Street,’ I said. ‘If I am to board and lodge away from home, it shall be at some other person’s expense.’

“‘As for the lodging, such as it is,’ remarked Mr. Rustin slowly, ‘you will have

that free sure enough ; but for anything else you will have to pay, and precious high too. Come, sir ! it can't be for long, you know ; let me persuade you to go to Sloman's. Be advised, sir, do.'

“ And thus he proceeded at intervals during the whole of the drive ; and even at the very gates of the prison itself he entreated me, almost with tears in his eyes—the wine having by that time got well into his head—to come with him, and he would speak to the people, and I should have everything just as particular as if I was at home.

“ ‘ Private room, good fire, tea and toast, and all comfortable,’ was the luxurious picture he presented for my consideration ; and —shall I confess it ?—for one moment, looking at the outside of this abode, he tempted me. It could not be for long, as he said, my cowardice pleaded. Alas ! experience has proved that I decided wisely when I resisted the voice of the charmer.

“ ‘ I have quite made up my mind,’ I

said ; hearing which, he groaned, and having treated me 'not to blame him,' rang the bell.

" At the sound my heart seemed to drop. Here was a nice ending to a not disreputable business career !—and brought about, too, by my own inconceivable folly. The night was raw, and the pavement damp. I felt chilled to my very bones, and could not avoid shivering—which action being noticed by Mr. Rustin, he began a fresh sentence concerning Sloman's.

" 'Confound Sloman !' I exclaimed, enraged, because I really repented my decision ; and then the door swung slowly open, and in we marched.

" Formally Mr. Rustin delivered me up to a warder ; he gave the particulars of the debt, which were duly entered ; and during the time occupied by this performance, my portrait was, as I have since ascertained, being taken by the man 'on the key.' If ever any of my descendants, therefore, should

entertain the slightest curiosity on the subject of my appearance, he will doubtless find that work of art carefully preserved amongst the treasures of Whitecross Street.

“ My idea of a prison had always been that it was a place where people were locked up separately, and where, if one preferred to remain altogether in his own cell, there was no necessity to see the other inmates at all ; but I was undeceived when the man ushered me into a room where sat a number of people talking, reading, and smoking.

“ There were some rough benches scattered about, and I took possession of one as far distant from the assembled company as possible.

“ My modesty, however, did not prove of much avail. In a moment I was surrounded by half-a-dozen eager questioners. Had I just come in ? Was I going to stay ? Was it bankruptcy ? Had I ever been there be-

fore? to all of which inquiries I returned such short answers that wrath rapidly succeeded to curiosity, and I was immediately treated to a number of satirical remarks, concerning my appearance, my manners, my accent, and my possible future.

“ ‘He is a lord in disguise,’ said the chief of my tormentors at last—an old man to whom years had taught nothing, save blasphemy and obscenity. ‘He is a lord, that is what he is; come to judge for himself of the delights of imprisonment for debt. He will rise and move the abolition of White-cross Street one of these days in the House, and we will read his speech in the papers. Come away; he wants to put down ‘in his note-book all he has heard already.’ And so with jeering laughter mingled with oaths and filthy remarks, they left me to my reflections.

“ ‘At all events,’ I thought, ‘it cannot be long before the time comes for retiring to rest, and to-morrow I shall ask the

governor to allow me to remain altogether in my own room.'

“ My own room ! Gracious Heaven ! shall I ever forget my first sight of it—an apartment divided off into stalls like those in a stable, each stall containing a small bed, the linen of which was black with dirt.

“ Instinctively I drew back a step, at sight of this horrible den, and the action being noticed produced screams of laughter from my companions.

“ ‘ Where’s his lordship’s canopied couch, with the silk velvet hangings and the satin coverlet ? ’

“ ‘ Where’s his groom of the chamber, and his band to play him to sleep ? ’

“ ‘ Where’s his valet to pull off his boots ? ’ they cried in chorus, and after that there ensued such a carnival of ribaldry and blasphemy, such a continuous stream of brutal jests, of coarse remarks, of frightful oaths, as I could have imagined forming the entertainments of Pandemonium, but

certainly not of even the lowest human abode.

“ When the lights were extinguished the confusion grew worse ; two or three times the clothes were slyly pulled off me ; but at length, waiting an opportunity, I hit one fellow such a blow on the face, that his friends, not approving apparently the dull sound it made, and the cry it elicited from him, crept back to their beds, and left me in comparative peace.

“ Never on earth, I think, however, were such conversations held as those I listened to in Whitecross Street, that night, till at length I was fain to cover my ears, and try to shut out the sound.

“ After hours the uproar gradually subsided—first one, then another dropped off to sleep—and I alone, of all those wretched creatures, kept my vigil in the darkness of the winter’s night.

“ Next day I arranged with the ‘steward’ as he is called, to cater for me ; and

until this morning his contract must have proved profitable, for touch food I could not —more by reason of my own distress of mind than the repulsive character of the unclean messes which are set before one.”

“To-day, however, I have decided I must do something ; my temporary aberration of intellect has lasted long enough, and it is now absolutely necessary that I should take measures against drifting into absolute insanity.

“Already I have written to my solicitor and to McLean ; a special messenger has been despatched to Briant View Terrace, to bring tidings of my family, more especially of Susie ; for no news has reached me for twenty-four hours. Surely, if the worst were to happen, they would at least let me know.

“Shall I ever get out of this place ? Have people died here ? have they gone mad ? have they committed suicide ? or do all become reckless and profane ?—reckless

as regards this world and the next ; holding in non-esteem everything which their happier fellows consider of most account here and hereafter.

“ This is a place of devils. I shall describe its horrors no more.”

END OF DIARY.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT BRIANT VIEW TERRACE.

From Patty to Mrs. St. Clair.

“ DEAREST MAMMA,—It is only because I so faithfully promised to tell you *everything* that I write at all ; for it breaks my heart to distress you with an account of the troubles here. They are increasing every hour, and unless I or some one else can see Frank and consult with him as to what ought to be done, I confess it baffles me to imagine what the end will be.

“ I should go to where Frank is, but I really dare not leave the house. Poor Bella

is utterly unfit even to think ; she sits all day wringing her hands, and saying she has ruined her husband, and killed her child. I fear she has done the first, and Susie is very bad indeed, poor darling, and keeps moaning and crying for her papa, which must be very hurtful to Bella.

“ Dear mother, when I started for London I lamented that you could not stand in my stead. Now I am *thankful* you have been spared the sight of so much misery. Pray do not let any one read this letter except you and my father. I think we ought to keep the sorrow to ourselves as much as possible.

“ In my first letter I told you Frank had been arrested—that Susie was seriously ill—that the house seemed wretched—that Bella appeared turning crazy. Now things are worse than ever. Bella has been crazy, and Frank too, I think ; Susie is dangerously ill, and—but there, I must come to that worst of worst gently.

“Of course, I never imagined otherwise than that Frank would re-appear within twenty-four hours, and so I made myself, and tried to make Bella, tolerably comfortable ; but, Bella’s experience being probably greater than mine, I signally failed in the latter attempt.

“‘No,’ she said ; , I have seen the last of my husband, and I never appreciated him till now.’

“‘Had not you better go and tell him that ?’ I suggested ; whereupon she burst into a torrent of tears, and declared she never should see him again on earth.

“Dear Mamma, you know I hate this sort. of thing, as much as I detest women who cannot exactly realise the precise state of life in which it has pleased God to place them, and I therefore said to Bella—

“‘Nonsense ! Really you are enough to drive any rational person insane !’

“‘You do not understand my trouble, Patty,’ she answered ; and came over and

put both her hands on my shoulders, and kissed me. Dearest mother, I never loved Bella so much before.

“‘ Darling, tell me everything ; are we not sisters ?’ I suggested.

“‘ Yes,’ she replied ; but somehow the idea did not seem to give her much comfort. At all events, she did not tell me everything. Since writing the above, I beg to amend it ; she really comprehended nothing. She knew that by some means she had got Frank’s affairs into a frightful mess ; but how or why, to this moment, I am confident she does not understand.

“ It strikes me that both she and Frank must, a few months since, have lost their senses. So far as I can make out from what the servants and the children say, Frank has been staying at home and managing the house and Bella has been taking charge of the business ; and truth obliges me to say, he seems to have made as great a *fiasco* as she.

“ Certainly the house was never so

wretched, even during Bella's *régime*, as it is now ; but then a dreadful woman who has only one redeeming virtue, that of being able to cook, tells me, 'Master found out there was dreadful goings on under missus's very eyes—a wasting of his substance, and taking away the character of his house—a ordering of just what they liked from the tradespeople, and keeping of all their friends and relations and sweethearts out of the sweat of master's brow, as the saying is.'

"Certainly there could not be much chance of such things happening now, for I cannot even get a loaf of bread unless I first send threepence three-farthings for it. I asked, as a matter of curiosity, the charwoman aforementioned for an explanation of so singular a phenomenon, remembering, as I did, a time when *nothing* in the house was paid for—when ready money seemed an unknown form of expression—when, from a box of hair-pins to a velvet dress, every item ordered was 'put in the bill.'

“ ‘ Miss,’ she answered oracularly, ‘ latterly the master has paid everybody cash, and settled up everybody’s bills. There is not a tradesman to whom he owes as much as a brass farden ; and if you have paid people regularly and then wants to run credit, they think there is something wrong.’

“ ‘ Then the fact of paying ready money is more suspicious than running up a bill ? ’ I suggested.

“ ‘ Right you are, miss. Whenever gentlefolks begins the cash system, it is thought they are going to economise ; and if, after that, they wants credit, it is supposed they never mean to pay.’

“ There is no doubt reason in all this, if not rhyme ; but it does not tend to raise the character of the British tradesman in my eyes. Rather it seems to prove that, as a rule, the tradesman and the wife are mutual conspirators against the husband’s purse. Were I a king, I should make a law rendering all household debts irrecoverable after one

week. Seven years, they told me, is the time for all debts. Seven days I would make it for ribs of beef and quarts of milk and gorgeous feminine apparel.

“I have written all the foregoing because I *cannot bear* coming to what I have to say.

“Yesterday evening I was up with Susie (dear mother, send me some poultry and eggs, and a few pots of black currant jam, and anything else you can spare ; such things are so dear in London, and the poor child must not be allowed to sink), when Elizabeth whispered that ‘a gentleman wanted to see me or missus particular.’

“‘I am afraid, miss, he ain’t no good,’ said Elizabeth ; ‘for the minit I opened the front door he bolted in without a word, and says he must see Mr. or Mrs. Sinclair, or some of the family.’

“‘Do you think he is a thief ?’ I asked. ‘Is there anything in the hall he can take ?’

“‘Oh, lor ! no, miss ; I don’t think he’s a thief, I think he is something far worse

than that—something like him who came the night master went away.'

"I am not given to fainting, as you know, but I had to hold on by the bannister as I went downstairs. We read of these sort of things in books, but we never quite understand the meaning of them till they come and meet us in the hall face to face, as that man did me.

"'Mrs. Sinclair?' he said.

"'No, her sister; Mrs. Sinclair is ill, and Mr. Sinclair from home.'

"'So I heard,' he answered.

"'Will you leave any message for him?' I asked.

"'Well, the fact of the matter is, miss—may I just go into this room and speak to you privately? There is half a year's rent owing, and if you cannot pay me to-night I shall be obliged to leave a man here till the matter is arranged. Very sorry indeed, but business is business, and unpleasant business equally so.'

“‘You need not apologise,’ I said: ‘please tell me the worst at once.’

“No doubt he thought I was accustomed to such matters, for he put a paper into my hand, one word of which I could not read, whilst he proceeded to explain, so much for rent, so much for expenses, so much for something else.

“‘But you know I cannot procure such an amount in a moment,’ I said, ‘more especially at so late an hour. Why did you not come earlier?’

“‘Ah! miss,’ he said, ‘we must just come when we can.’

“‘You are so busy?’ I asked.

“‘Wonderful busy, to be sure.’

“I could not tell you what I felt. The aggregation of misery that sentence implied overwhelmed me. Ours was no isolated case; in probably hundreds of houses the same scene was being enacted. Like death, these wretches respected no threshold; unlike death, there was nothing of hope,

nothing of sanctity, nothing exalting about the matter. It was all grovelling, human, pecuniary, wretched.

“‘ I will see what can be done to-morrow,’ was my reply.

“‘ Yes, miss ; you’ll excuse *me*, but I must just make a little memorandum—mere matter of form, *I hope*,’ and the creature proceeded to make what I have since heard is called his inventory, whilst I, sitting in an arm-chair, which he had put down in his list, watched him.

“ Shall I ever forget that man ? Shall I ever know perfect faith again, remembering that such people can be ? A slight, not bad-looking individual of about thirty, who spoke very good English, and comported himself in a frank, superior style to much better and honester men—a person who had doubtless married suitably—who had a comfortable home—daughters he hoped to marry above their rank—sons he meant to educate well, and perhaps train up to be ornaments

to one of the learned professions. Are the sons of such men the black sheep of law, divinity, and physic? Are the descendants of these the cowards who run away in battle, —who, unequal to an emergency when a vessel strikes at sea, crowd the boats, and leave women to perish? I do not wonder now at some Londoners keeping the secrets of their business sacred from their wives. For me, if I ever were to marry, I should prefer old Gibbs, who takes his week's dole from the Hall, to a cockney of whom I knew little; for, after what I have seen, it would not surprise me, any day after marriage, to discover the beloved of my heart hat in hand, asking alms at Charing Cross.

“This man of whom I speak wore a red camellia in his button-hole, and was altogether as dapper and well got-up as any clerk on his way to the City. He is, I find, an auctioneer, with every prospect of being some day worth more thousands per annum than we can count hundreds Pro-

bably he will eventually buy a place in the country cheap, give five pounds a year to the schools, contribute a sovereign on collection Sundays, and die in the odour of sanctity.

“To-night I am bitter, and hate everybody. Forgive me; it is not Christian, but it is human.

“Before he had got ‘marble eight-day clock’ down, there came a modest knock at the front door, which he answered himself.

“‘I shall be obliged to leave a man here, miss,’ he said; ‘but he will keep out of your way, and be quite quiet,’ he added, as though speaking of a dog. Then he whispered some directions to his subordinate and left the house.

“‘Sit down here for a few minutes,’ I said to the man; and he obeyed me, putting his hat under the chair, and taking out a huge handkerchief to wipe himself withal.

“For a minute after the hall-door closed

I stood silent, wondering what in the world I should do. What could I say about the intruder—what did he propose to do with himself? Was it a real fact, instead of a horrible dream, that he intended honouring me with his company for the night? How could I keep it from Bella? These questions chased one after another through my brain; but an apologetic cough brought me suddenly back to myself.

“‘I was just wondering what I could do with you,’ I said, answering the creature’s unspoken question.

“‘Well, miss, it certainly is disagreeable, particularly in such a house as this; but I will keep myself to myself, and be as little in the way as possible. No one need be a bit the wiser.’

“‘I fancy several people are very much the wiser already,’ I answered. ‘However, that cannot be helped. Sit down for a few moments, and I will see what can be done.’

“Then I went up-stairs and had a good cry—I could not help it, I was frightened. For the first time I had come face to face with the law; and although the law's representative was only a decrepit old man, whom a good gust of wind might readily have blown out of Briant View Terrace, still there was the awful power behind, the reality of which I had never comprehended till then.

“Elizabeth went down and arranged matters for me, heard all he had to say, settled where he was to be located, got him something to eat, and then came up-stairs again, remarking that she had told him to lock the door inside.

“‘I was afraid of that Mrs. Rudge poking about,’ the girl added; ‘and oh, miss, can we get rid of her and keep it quiet among ourselves?’—which suggestion seemed so admirable, and, indeed, the prospect of Mrs. Rudge’s absence appeared altogether such a relief, that I paid her a week’s wages and

said for the present we should not require her any more ; hearing which, she thanked me very much, and said it was a great convenience to her, as Rudge had been ailing much lately, and, further, she had been sent for by one or two of her best families to cook 'dinners' for them—

" 'And that is better for me, of course, miss ; though being engaged here, to oblige Mr. Sinclair, in course I should never have mentioned such matters.'

" 'Thank you,' I said ; but all the time I knew she was filled with envy, hatred, and spite, and that I had made a mistake. Better to have trusted her ; but one learns wisdom always too late—so late, indeed, that I often wonder what is the use of learning it at all.

" I did not tell Bella that night ; I should not have told her at all had I seen any way out of the difficulty ; but after sending to the office and finding there was no money there—or at least no more than

I needed for current expenses—I went up to Bella's dressing-room and explained to her the exact state of the case.

“‘I hope they will not meddle with Susie’s room,’ was all the remark she made ; and then she got up and walked towards the cheval glass in a blind, helpless sort of way. Next minute she was lying on the floor in a dead faint.

“Poor Bella has had her share of trouble, I suspect, though she will not talk to or tell me about it.

“She is most *wonderfully improved* ; I could not have believed in any trouble changing a person so much. She is humble and docile enough on every point save one, and that vexes me sadly. She absolutely refuses either to write or go to see Frank—why I cannot imagine. He has forbidden my coming to where he is ; but I must go, despite of this, for I hope to obtain a solution of Bella’s feelings, from him. I shall not close this letter till I return.

“Just returned, oh ! mamma from *such* a place. Poor dear Frank ! I cannot see to tell you all about it, for I cannot keep from crying ; and yet I feel happier about him and Bella than for many a day past. Will write again to-morrow.

“ Your loving Daughter,

“ PATTIE.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

PATTY TO MRS. ST. CLAIR (*continued*).

“*Thursday.*

“I COULD not send my letter to you yesterday, as promised, dear mother, for just as I was unlocking my desk to commence writing it, Elizabeth came to tell me there was another of those dreadful people below. I will not add anything more about this, as he did not, thank God, stay very long. He was sent by some milliner with whom Bella had dealt—the only domestic account outstanding, it appears, poor Frank having so far as he knew paid off every sixpence of their private debts.

“Mr. Varham, the gentleman who was in partnership with Frank when Bella was first married, came up yesterday just when I was in perfect despair.

“He had heard of our first trouble from Mr. McLean, and brought sufficient money to pay that off; but when he found there was a second difficulty, he discharged that debt instead, and this morning returned with enough to relieve us altogether. He was kindness itself; and I did not think I could have talked so freely of my anxieties to any one out of my own family. He has taken the whole conduct of Frank’s affairs, and is thoughtfulness personified to every person excepting Bella.

“To her he spoke in a way which made me shiver. He said she had been the ruin of her husband’s prospects and the bane of his life; that she had married a good man and made existence intolerable to him; that she had neglected Frank, and her children, and her household.

“‘Did Frank ever tell you so?’” she asked at this juncture.

“‘No, he is not a man to cry his troubles out in the market-place,’ Mr. Varham answered; ‘but other people are not blind, if a husband be dumb. And to crown everything, you refuse to write or go to him, quadrupling thereby the difficulties with which I have already to contend.’

“‘No, I cannot go, and I cannot write,’ she said a little sullenly. And then I entreated him to spare her.

“‘She has enough sorrow already,’ I began. ‘Poor Susie will not be left to us long, and Frank is away, and she herself is ill; and, besides, we have none of us yet heard her side of the question. Bella, when are you going to exorcise your dumb spirit and speak?’

“‘Ah! Patty, it is not so easy to speak sometimes,’ she replied. And then she put her arms about my neck and kissed me; after which she left the room crying.

" Since that time ' she has never been away from Susie's bedside, though I think every time the poor child cries for 'papa' it is like a stab to Bella.

" Do you not think, darling mother, you could now manage to come up for a few days? Bella might talk to you more unreservedly than to any one else; and I am confident it only requires a sentence to put matters right between her and Frank.

" She says the reason Mr. Varham is so bitter against her is that his wife and she could not agree, and have not visited for years; 'but if he can do any good for Frank,' she went on, 'it does not matter what he thinks of me.'

" 'Dear Bella,' I replied, 'I wish you would tell me all about it.'

" 'I cannot,' was the only answer I could get. She does not seem able to endure a single question on the subject of her City experience; but little things crop up every now and then, which give me

some faint idea of what she must have suffered.

“For instance, the day after that man came, I asked her if it would not be better to dispose of her jewellery—you remember Frank constantly gave her beautiful ornaments, and then there was the set of pearls her godfather left her. After a good deal of fencing and hesitation, it came out that she had already utilised these things.

“‘They are not sold, I believe,’ she said, ‘but Mr. McLean borrowed me some money on their security.’

“‘What a time you must have had, Bella!’ I said. ‘Why in the world did you not tell Frank all about it? I declare I have no more patience with you both than I might with a pair of refractory children.

“‘It was my fault; do not blame Frank,’ she answered. (There is a change! I call the ‘Taming of the Shrew’ nothing in comparison to Bella’s conversion.)

“‘Really!’ I remarked—the observation was not kind, but it was irresistible—‘it

would not much surprise me to see you darn another pair of stockings before I die.' Whereupon she answered, she only wished she had nothing else to do or think about.

"'I would rather go on the treadmill than re-live that short time in the City.' And I believe she would, although, as I told her, she knew as little practically about the happiness of treadmilling as she did six months since concerning the delights of managing a business.

"I have now to speak of my visit to Frank. Of all the misery of this wretched affair, his seems to me the worst. We, at least, have, spite of every trouble, a comfortable house—comfortable beds to sleep on, comfortable rooms where we can go and cry when the fit is on us; but fancy a man—fancy a gentleman being turned into a place amongst the lowest of the low, forced to consort with them, compelled to listen to their talk, to live, eat, sleep amongst the very scum of society !

“Don’t show this to papa, because of course he does not think there is any scum; but only let him visit Whitecross Street, and he will alter his opinion.

“Dear mamma, evén the *way* to Whitecross Street is a marvel. I took an omnibus to the General Post Office, from whence I inquired my way—shamefacedly, I must confess, for I thought every one would know my errand.

“I was to walk on till I got to Jewin Street, which I did; and next I reached Fore Street, passing *en route* Cripplegate Church—the bells of which, Frank tells me, play some air every hour, and the Hundredth Psalm at midnight. I should think the Hundredth Psalm was never heard to such disadvantage as from Whitecross Street Prison. There is a portion, too, of the old London Wall in Cripplegate Churchyard; but I do not want to see it. I never wish, even for the sake of antiquities, to go near Whitecross Street again.

“Cripplegate Church is in Fore Street, and Whitecross Street is the first turning to the left after you pass the church.

“Returning I was in such perturbation of spirit that I lost my way, and I got into a thoroughfare lined with costermongers’ barrows; where dreadful things in the shape of fish and vegetables were displayed for sale; where the shouting of the men was enough to deafen one, and the chattering of the women who had come to market simply indescribable. A good Samaritan showed me the way out of this Cretan labyrinth; but, unhappily, I lost myself again, and came first to a street where I should think there were enough saddles, and whips, and bridles, and horsecloths to have lasted London for twenty years, and then to a great space filled with cattle-pens, and called Smithfield.

“By way of Bartholomew’s Hospital—which bounds one side of this space, and which, tell dear papa, I do not think one

bit historical or romantic-looking—I reached Giltspur Street, and so, as Pepys says, to Newgate Street.

“Newgate Prison faced me, grim and black, as I passed the east end of Saint Sepulchre’s Church; and I had come straight (with a few mistakes) from another prison.

“Shall I ever think of a man ‘in trouble’ lightly in the future? Will ‘committed,’ or ‘taken into custody,’ or ‘arrested’ ever have anything but a terrible meaning for me again?

“I am at a loss to decide whether it is well or ill for people thoroughly to understand such misery.

“I feel it must be hard to pass through life without understanding in some small degree the trials and temptations of other people; and yet I should not like to become familiarised with them.

“That beautiful prayer would be mine, I think, in reference to misfortune. ‘Give me

neither poverty nor riches,' said he of old time. 'Give me neither complete non-understanding nor complete understanding,' I should entreat; 'give me just enough knowledge to sympathise with these people's troubles, but spare me the knowledge of how their troubles came to be deserved.' For I am not as a God, understanding good and evil, and it seems to me that when one leaves one's own peaceful home nothing but trouble and sin are abroad to meet one.

"I wander, though, from Frank. Admitted into the prison, I was conducted across a yard about as large as the kitchen garden at the Hall—surrounded on three sides by high walls blackened by London smoke, and on the fourth by the building.

"In this yard he was summoned by name—'Francis Sinclair! Francis Sinclair!'

"I was passing through the door of the visitors' room at the moment, and felt inclined to read the turnkey a lecture on the distinctions of rank.

“Fortunately, however, I remembered that a prisoner is a prisoner all the world over, and that if, in addition, he chance to be a gentleman in debt, the law punishes him much more severely than it would had he committed some much more grievous crime than ‘falling into difficulties.’

“The ordinary Englishman’s God being Money, it is natural he should visit any profanation of *that* shrine with treble penalties. All the foregoing, I should tell you, is Frank second-hand. Pray do not accredit me with the possession of so many original ideas.

“As I stood in the doorway, waiting, with all eyes in the yard turned to look, Frank came from a corner where he had been walking up and down by himself, and crossed the pavement.

“You never saw such a change! I really was shocked, but felt so thankful I had gone to see him, though he said, ‘Patty, Patty! how could you do such a thing? I would

not have had you come to such a place on any consideration.'

"'I am here, Frank,' I answered, 'and there is an end of it; and now I want to talk to you.'

"'There is no place where I can speak to you privately,' he said.

"'That cannot be helped,' I replied; 'better to speak anywhere than not at all;' and so we walked side by side to the other end of the long room.

CHAPTER XXV.

PATTY TO MRS. ST. CLAIR—(*continued*).

“ Oh, mamma ! how can I describe it ? Such a room ! with the floor so dirty that I was obliged to gather my skirts around me as I crossed it, and sat down on a wooden bench, with a deal table in front of us, that had never been scrubbed in its life, and was filthy with beer-stains and tobacco-ash, whilst names and initials were cut in all directions.

“ ‘ Well, Patty,’ he began. He had asked about Susie when we first met.

“ ‘ Well, Frank,’ I answered.

“ ‘ Why are you here, after all I said about your not coming ? ’

“ ‘ I have come to know why you are here. No one can give me the slightest information. Every one seems to think you might be at home if you liked.’

“ ‘ Who is every one ? ’

“ ‘ I cannot exactly tell——’

“ ‘ If you mean Mr. McLean and Bella, I fear neither is a very competent judge of the matter. No ; twenty-four hours before I came here I might have averted this trouble, had I only known of its existence ; but now I must be a bankrupt before I can free myself from my creditors. That is the plain English of the affair, and I am trying to face the inevitable as well as I can.’

“ ‘ But, Frank, what has been the cause of it ? ’ I asked. ‘ Were you really ill, or was it that you could endure Bella’s nagging no longer.’

“ ‘ Please do not speak in that way, Patty,’ he interrupted—‘ of my wife,’ he added after a slight pause.

“ You and your wife will never live hap-

pily unless some one speaks out his or her mind to both of you,' I answered. ' You have gone on bearing, and she encroaching, till the result is you are here, and she moping in her own room, crying for hours together. Whatever sins Bella may have committed, she is sincerely sorry for them now, and she blames herself for everything that has happened.'

" 'Then why does she neither write nor send to me ? ' he asked.

" 'I think she is afraid or ashamed,' I replied. ' If you were to write to her—'

" At this point, however, he interrupted me. ' Patty,' he said, ' some day I hope to return to my home, and I want that home to be happier than it has hitherto proved. If I took the initiative now, Bella would regard it as a sign of weakness or a confession of having been in the wrong. That I have been utterly in the wrong, I admit, but not in the way she supposes.'

“ ‘She is quite changed, however,’ I said eagerly; but he only shook his head.

“ ‘She has been in trouble lately, but people do not really change the opinions of a lifetime in a moment.’

“ ‘They are not the opinions of her lifetime,’ I said; ‘she never had any of those sort of notions when she was a girl, only she had naturally a discontented temper, and you indulged her so much, she thought there was no one so clever or so little appreciated as she. And then there were those dreadful people who brought a bad influence to bear upon her. Besides, like most women, she had only the vaguest idea of your actual position. She thought you were much richer than was actually the case, and it irritated her when you seemed vexed at being asked for money. Being lazy too—for Bella was *always* lazy—it was less trouble to let the servants manage the house than to manage it herself, and they ran her into debt and difficulties of all sorts.’

“ ‘ Poor Bella ! ’ he said.

“ ‘ And you will write to her ? ’ I entreated. He did not answer for a minute, but sat there tracing with his fore-finger the letters which went to make up the name of ‘ Edward,’ carved on the table ; at last he said—

“ ‘ When I first allowed Bella to take my place in the City, I vowed I would never resume business, never again try to step into my proper position as head of the household and breadwinner for it, till my wife asked me to do so. She has not done so yet. I have no means of knowing what her real opinions may be. Very likely she still thinks me just as perverse and disagreeable as she always did. Oh, Bella ! ’ he suddenly broke off, ‘ if I only knew what I could do or leave undone to make our life happier, I should not care even for this.’

“ ‘ You dear, good Frank, you will be happy yet, please God.’

“ ‘ There is not much prospect of it at

present, Patty,' he said sorrowfully, and as my eye followed his while it glanced round the room, I could not but know how horribly true his words were.

"Ah! mother, the misery of that place — the pale women who were sitting there, talking to degraded reckless men; the keen-looking attorneys' clerks who were writing down particulars; the horsey betting people who had come to see old friends whose ill-luck had 'run,' as I heard one of them say, people with horse-shoe gilt scarf-pins, gaudy neck-ties, wonderful cutaway coats, tight trousers, and canes ornamented with horses' heads, which latter they sucked when not drinking ale or smoking cigars; with here and there a quiet married couple who talked in whispers as to how the wife should manage till the husband 'got out,' made up a *tout ensemble* of misery difficult, I should imagine, to match in any other place in London.

"It is here they put off their masks,' said Frank. 'Here I have seen the great-

est devil-may-care in the prison crying over the baby his wife brought in her arms. Here men confess, as one may say, to their lawyers or their friends. Here anxiety takes the place of bravado. Here misery can be found *au naturel* without the accompaniments of blasphemy, ribald jokes, and fiendish laughter. It is awfully real, Patty, this visitors' room—to which you must never come again.'

" ' Why not ? ' I asked.

" ' There is an old proverb, ' You cannot touch pitch,' is there not ?

" ' Yes, but it is not of universal application ; every woman living must touch pitch some time or other, and it is her own fault whether she be contaminated by the contact or not. At all events I intend to try the experiment.'

" ' You must not, Patty. If you persist I shall ask the governor to give orders that you are not to be admitted.'

" ' Are you serious in saying it pains you to see me here ?'

“ ‘ More than words can tell.’

“ ‘ Would it grieve you to see Bella?’

“ ‘ I should not like her to comprehend such a wretched place existed.’ So he said, and yet all the time I knew he was longing to see her even there. I am going to make up the quarrel, no matter how it may have originated, wishing for nothing so much as for Bella to take omnibus, and walk from the Post Office to Jewin Street, and thence to the prison.

“ Really the sight of this man’s patient untiring love is enough to make one wish to marry ! The worst of it is I should never get such a husband. It is only women like Bella, who take everything and give nothing back, who achieve such fortune. But yet I fancy Bella would give a good deal to hear Frank say ‘ I forgive you,’ though what there may be to forgive I cannot exactly tell.

“ She is wonderfully improved and has, I hope, learned a lesson.

“The proof of the pudding is, however, in the eating, and when Frank returns I trust he may find Bella everything she ought to be.

“I told him I felt sure she missed him dreadfully. ‘She never ceases fretting and reproaching herself,’ I finished; but he only smiled sadly, after the fashion of one who thought I was amiably trying to put a pleasant face on a disagreeable fact; and so as I knew I could say nothing to convince him, I squeezed his hand till I know it must have ached, for I was trying to keep from crying, and—came away.

“And since then, as I told you, Mr. Varham has been, and I *hope*, and *trust*, and *believe* he will manage to get things right somehow.

“But, dear mother, if you or my father can come, do. Frank wants some one to talk to him, wiser than I am, and so does Bella. Good-bye. — Ever your loving Daughter,

“PATTY.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

MRS. ST. CLAIR TO HER HUSBAND.

“Briant View Terrace.

“My dear Fitzhugh,—

“I arrived here safely this afternoon, and could I only know your health was continuing to improve, and that the dear girls are seeing to your comfort and insisting on your taking medicine and nourishment at the proper hours, thankful, indeed, should I feel to be with my two poor children in their trouble.

“As for Patty, I need not tell you how she bears up under all she has had to endure. Certainly, she is the bravest as well as the most unselfish creature I ever met. She is thinner and paler than when she left us, but her smile is as bright, and her manner

as cheerful as if she had never passed through so frightful an ordeal.

“Poor, dear, self-willed, self-opinionated, utterly mistaken Bella, what can I write about her, except that she is heart-broken? If I know anything of the symptoms of remorse, she has endured, and is enduring, agonies of repentance. At last she has discovered what a cold comforter the world is—what a hollow affair friendship generally proves—what a generous, forbearing man she married—and last, but not least, she has arrived at some understanding of herself.

“God grant she may not have come to a knowledge of these things too late!

“Naturally, I feel most for her. Granted that she did try Frank's patience—and I have no doubt she did beyond the bounds of endurance—he ought never to have allowed his wife to have become so completely master of the position.

“It is all very well to ask, as Mr. Varham asks me, what he was to do? as if he had

been powerless. I answer, he ought never to have given the reins out of his own hands ; and that if Bella were to blame for their domestic unhappiness, he alone is responsible for the pecuniary trouble which has fallen upon them.

“ And yet, when it comes across my mind —as I cannot help the thought doing—that it is a daughter of ours, over whose birth we rejoiced, whom I nursed through her child-
ish illness, whom I tried to train up to be a discreet, unselfish, loving woman—who has brought this misery on herself and her husband—my heart seems to die away within me.

“ When I contrast her and Patty, and see how much stronger nature is than training, I feel disheartened to think how little even the fondest parent can effect in the way of forming the character of her child.

“ But all this time I am not telling you that you must be more anxious to hear.

Mr. Varham seems to think there is still

some hope for Frank's business, always supposing he can be induced to talk freely to his friends, and put his shoulder bravely to the wheel.

“ Whether there is a hope for Susie I feel doubtful. The fact is, the child has been neglected. Poor Patty has done her best, but that best cannot, I fear, have been very excellent—called away from the sick room by other duties—distracted by other anxieties, and, beyond all things, short of money to provide those necessaries which, little as they seem, cost so much !

“ We have altered all that now. The poor darling wants for nothing. I felt it my duty to speak seriously to Bella about Susie's state, and I am thankful to see she takes her part—and more than her part—in nursing her child.

“ The perpetual cry for ‘papa’ must, I know, go to her very soul, but she bears up wonderfully ; indeed, I would rather see her more moved.

“There must come a reaction, for she seems now to have nerved herself to go through her task without tear or complaint.

“Sometimes, when I look at her poor white face—at her shrinking attitude—at her altered and humbled expression—I cannot help taking her in my arms and saying, ‘My dear—my poor suffering dear.’

“Then she puts me away—quietly and gently, but firmly.

“‘Don’t, mother; what I have to do I will do as well as I can; but I cannot if you pity me.’

“There is one thing she ought to do, however, that I cannot induce her to perform, namely, go to her husband.

“‘No,’ she says wearily, ‘Frank hates me—he must hate me. I have ruined him; I have made his home wretched; I have been neither a good wife nor a good mother. If Susie were only well again, I should like to go and hide myself where no one I ever knew should see my face again.’

“‘ And supposing that little Susie never gets well again ?’ I asked.

“‘ Then I wish I could be buried with her. Perhaps Frank would forget then and have a kindly thought of me, for the sake of the old days when we were so happy. Oh ! mother, *how* happy we were once.’

“ I have spoken to Mr. Varham about her, but he seems very bitter and intolerant. If he could see her poor changed face, and understand how unfeigned is her repentance, he would not judge her so severely.

“ Patty evidently is the realisation of his ideal of what a woman should be. Dear Patty, I wonder if that old fancy which I feel no doubt Bella tried to nip in the bud has been the cause of her being still single.

“ Supposing this to be the case, I imagine Frank will have a most powerful friend in Mr. Varham. As you know, I am utterly averse to matchmaking, but I cannot help seeing that Mr. Varham is devoted to our Patty.

“ When he first came to Bella’s assistance Patty was not aware he had been for years a widower, so there could be no second feeling to prevent her talking to him freely, as she might to a brother of her own or Frank’s; and I am very glad of this. When I came, however, he lost no time in telling me of his lonely position, and I drew my conclusions. As you will observe, I have written this letter on two separate days.

“ To-morrow I go to see Frank. Whenever there is any change for the better or the worse, you may depend upon hearing from me again.

“ Tell one of the girls to let me have a letter each day, if it only contains a line to say you continue to improve.

“ As ever, my dear Fitzhugh,

“ I am your loving wife.”

Sitting up in bed—looking rather wifeless and forlorn—but still with creature comforts about him in the shape of a good fire, and a breakfast-tray presided over by Rosina,

who had never married, and was never likely now to marry—who still painted indifferent pictures and performed Beethoven to the admiration of visitors who came to visit at the Rectory,—but in whom time had happily developed a number of domestic and attractive qualities besides those appertaining to such genius as she possessed,—the Reverend Fitzhugh St. Clair perused the foregoing epistle penned by his better half, and smiled as he did so.

“What news, papa?” asked Miss Rosina, who, perhaps, because of her age, adhered to a juvenile style of addressing her parents, long abandoned by the younger members of the family.

“You can read it,” he answered. “We must not begin to make mysteries amongst ourselves at this time of day, eh! Rosy.”

For reply she kissed him; and then before she looked at the letter, poured out his tea and handed him his toast, and took the top off his egg. After that she sat

down before the fire and read what her mother had written.

“We should miss Patty, papa,” she remarked.

“That we should, Rosy,” answered the clergyman; “but it is better we were in such case than a good man.”

“Patty will write the next letter,” remarked Miss Rosina.

“What! to say she is engaged? I do not believe in such sharp practice as all that comes to,” said the Rector, handing over his cup for another supply of tea.

“You mistake me, papa,” replied his eldest-born, vindicating the reticence of her sex with a not unbecoming dignity. “Patty will write the next letter because Bella and Frank will by that time have made up their quarrel.”

“I trust you may prove a true prophet,” commented Mr. St. Clair. “The quarrels of lovers are poor trumpery affairs; but those of husband and wife are serious matters.”

Three mornings after, when Miss St. Clair entered her father's room, she said—

“I have been a true prophet ; this is from Patty, papa.”

“Open and read it,” answered Mr. St. Clair. “Notwithstanding Patty's privates and confidentials—and only for father and mother—she never writes a line, or thinks a thought, one might not read before a full congregation on Sunday.”

“Dearest father,” began Miss Rosina. “We are all so happy ; my mother cannot write to you and I must. Dear Frank—dear—dear—dearest Frank has been home ; and though he is gone—though, poor fellow, he had to go—it is all right between him and Bella.

“Yesterday afternoon we thought everything was wrong as it could be—that he must stay in Whitecross Street—that there was no hope for his business—that Susie would never see her papa again—that dear Bella's mistake was irremediable ; but a few

hours afterwards a cab drove up to the door, and Mr. Varham came in, followed by Frank—such a poor, weak, wasted, changed Frank, but still in the flesh.

“‘I want to see my wife and Susie,’ he said. I would have gone up-stairs to prepare Bella for his arrival, but Mr. Varham held me back.

“‘Let him go to her,’ he whispered; ‘they will settle matters better alone.’

“And they did. Dear mother, who was in the dressing-room, told me about it.

“Susie was tossing from side to side, as is her usual way, moaning for papa, and Bella, worn out with grief and watching, knelt by the bedside murmuring, ‘My darling, you are breaking mamma’s heart; if her life could bring papa to you he would be here now.’”

“He laid his hand on her head and said, ‘Bella dearest, I am here.’”

“And she flung her arms about him and kissed him as, I do not believe, she ever did before in his life, and then she fainted away;

and he, weak though he is, gathered enough strength to carry her into the dressing-room, where mother stood crying fit to break her heart.

“‘I must go,’ he said; ‘but tell Bella I love her just the same as I did when I asked her to marry me, and more.’ He then went back to where Susie lay and told her—

“‘Papa has to leave his little one for a few days; she will be good and get well while he is away.’

“Would you believe it, the darling has lain with a smile on her lips ever since, and the doctors—we have now plenty of them—say there is a chance for her life.

“Frank has gone to France, to be out of the way till matters are arranged for him here by Mr. Varham.

“I leave to-morrow for home with the children. Darling mother says I am to take them all home—all except poor Susie. Mr. Varham insists upon seeing me and them safe to our journey’s end; so pray tell Rosy she must expect a visitor.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

HAVE I, the writer of this story, anything more to tell? But little I admit; and that little will not require much space.

Mr. Varham took Frank Sinclair's business under his charge, Frank Sinclair being abroad, and carried it on under McLean's management until his friend's creditors came to their senses, and were willing to accept a guaranteed but deferred payment of twenty shillings in the pound. When all that was settled, Varham and Sinclair resumed their old relations, and Sinclair's offices rejoiced in the presence of a senior partner once more.

The house in Briant View Terrace was given up whenever Susie could be removed, and a house, not nearer the business, but much further off, was taken in the country for Bella and her children, by the especial request of Frank Sinclair's wife.

Ere these events, however, came fully to pass, another wedding had been celebrated by the Reverend Fitzhugh St. Clair.

On that occasion Patty became Mrs. Varham ; and if the marriage were a very quiet one, and ungraced by the presence of Sirs or Ladies, it has proved none the less happy on that account.

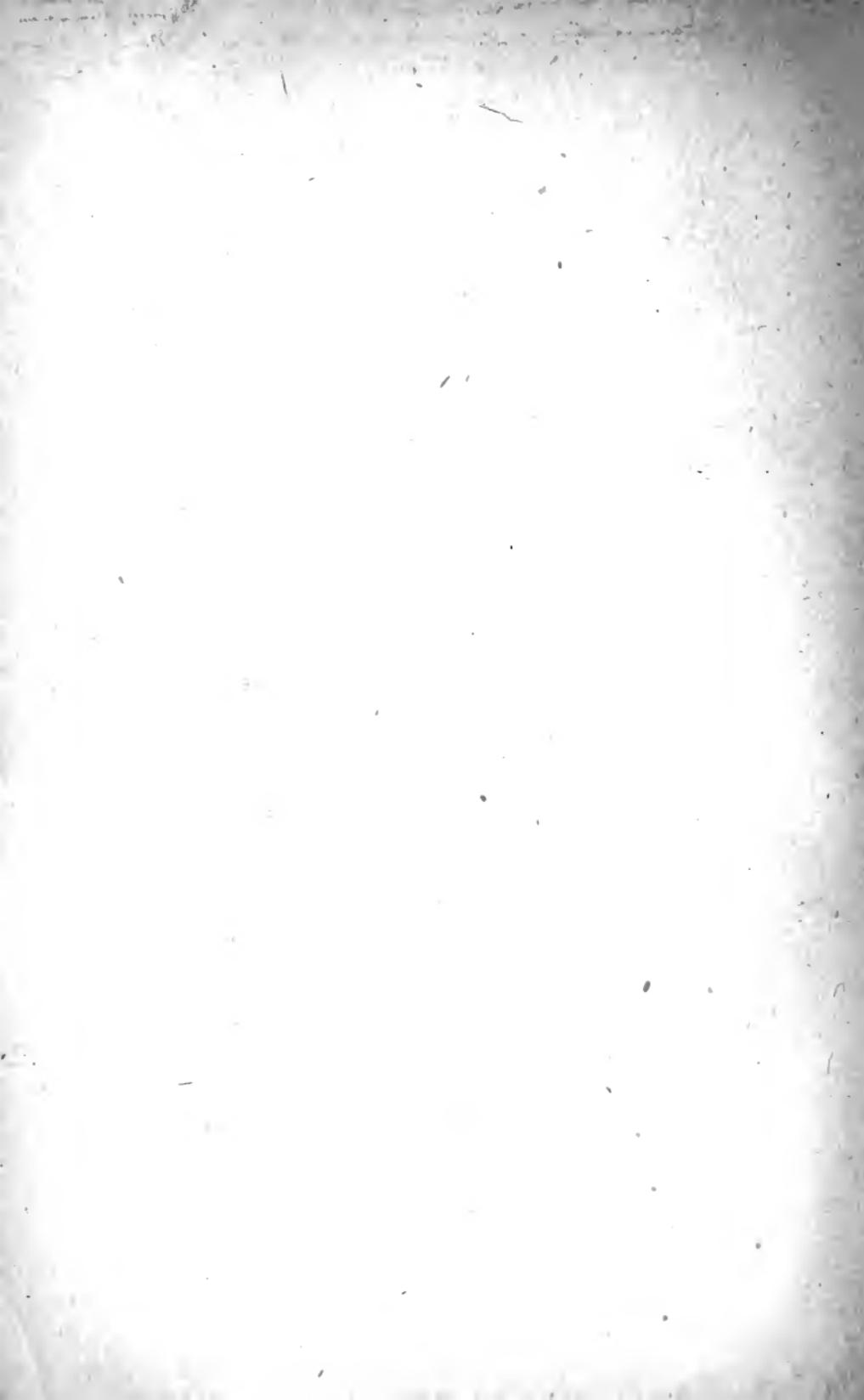
There is a large firm now in the City which has weathered many panics, and survived many commercial crises. It has done a sound business for many years, and it is doing remarkably well now, and the men who compose the firm are—Varham and Frank Sinclair.

In a country suburb, surrounded by green fields and pleasant woods, two houses stand in pleasant and neighbourly contiguity.

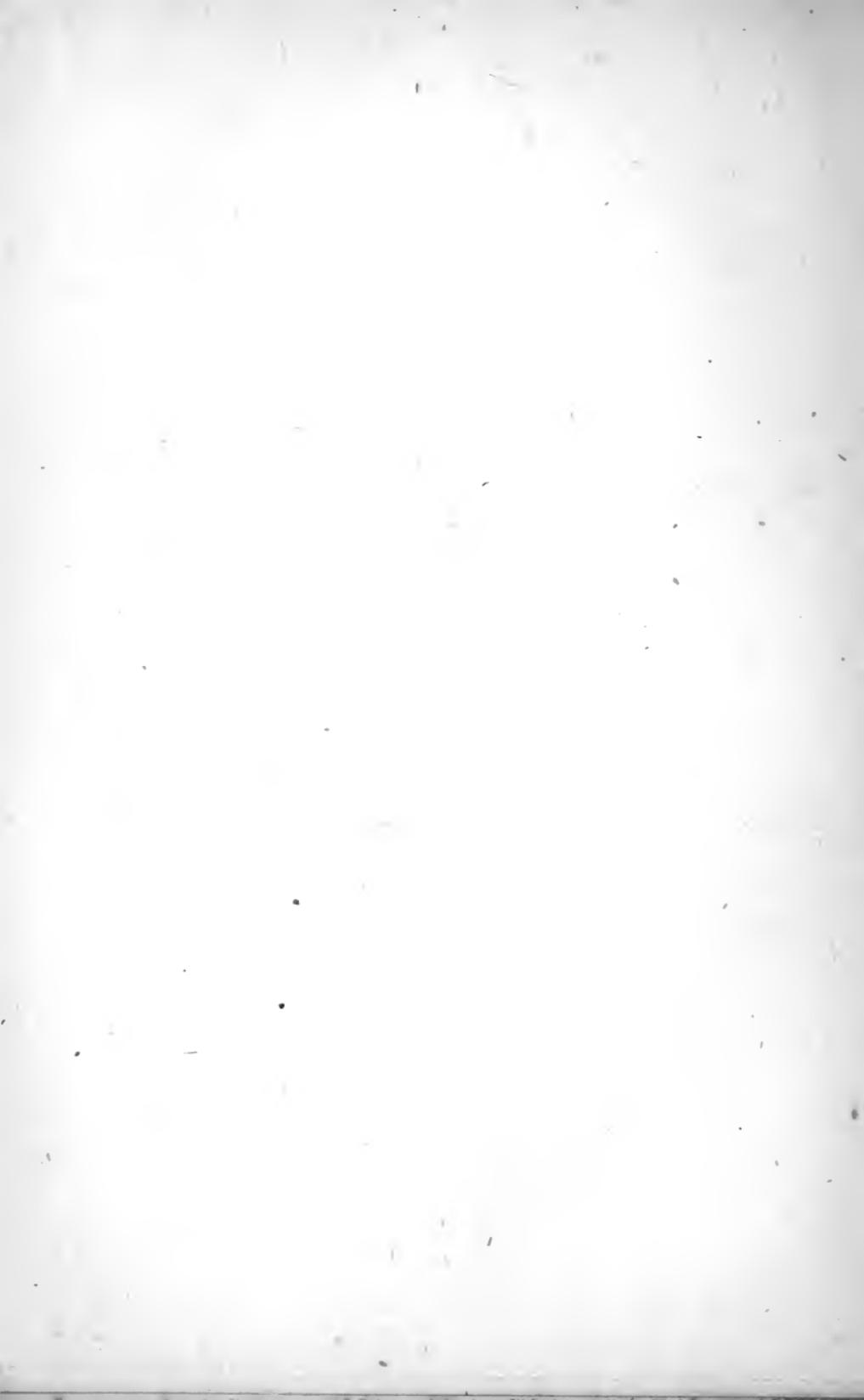
The smaller belongs to a man with a large family, the larger to a man whose wedding-day seems quite a recent event.

But these details make no difference in the friendly feeling or the sisterly association.

Patty's last baby crows in the arms of Bella's first-born; and Susie, to whom her long and dangerous illness has given a certain premature turn of mind, meditates concerning papa and her lessons in the leafy gardens of Mr. Varham, Frank Sinclair's rich partner and best friend.



MY FIRST LOVE.



MY FIRST LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

OUR FIRST MEETING.

I AM sitting alone in my chambers, holding in my hand a miniature. It is the likeness of a child—**MY FIRST LOVE.**

Above the mantelpiece hangs an oil painting. It is the portrait of a woman—**MY LAST Love.**

The whole of my life—my real life, I mean, not that which I lead when I am talking in court with my gown and wig on—or when I am at home with my children, now grown up about me, and my wife, still

a handsome woman, embroidering a pair of slippers, which can only be intended for wear in the next world, since there seems no reasonable probability of their being ever finished in this—not my life as it appears when I am telling my best after-dinner stories, or poring over the briefs which now, quicker than I want them, are sent to me by complaisant solicitors—not my outward and visible life that I pass amongst my fellows, but the real existence I spend with myself and my memory—has been influenced, coloured, shaded, by these two faces. Not more utterly were the ivory and the canvas changed by the painter's brush tracing the portraits of child and woman on them, than has my life been made what it is by the first love, and the last love which these likenesses recall.

Recall ! I have written and will not cancel the word ; but oh ! friends, the memory of all I hoped, of all I possessed, of all I lost, of all I suffered, is never so far

away from me as to need any extraneous circumstances, any effort of mind, to bring back to remembrance.

At any moment, whether I am amongst my fellows, or alone with my papers and books, I can whisper in the ear of that long ago time. It has never died to me. In my musty chambers a fragrance of the primroses and the violets that studded bank and copse in those blissful spring days, is wafted to me. Amid the roar of the London traffic I hear like a still small voice the murmur of the river, the gentle rustling of the wind amongst the topmost branches of the trees. When my blinds are down and my lamp lighted, I can see the field paths untrodden for a quarter of a century—the church in the distance—the children gathering wild flowers, aye, the very brambles growing by the wayside.

Sometimes in my dreams the burden of years drops off, and with no knowledge as to what the future might hold for me, I

wander through the woods hand-in-hand with one who loved to look for the blue bonnets' nest in the quick-set hedge, to gather the earliest apple-pie and meadow sweet that grew so abundantly beside the little stream where once we beheld a king-fisher who was wont to make for herself parasols, and swords, and butterfly cages, out of the rushes which throve in the piece of moorland that stretched between our cottage and the old mill.

I feel the sunshine dazzling my eyes, and the warm touch of the little fingers thrust into mine. I look down and I see the child with her fair hair, and her white skin, and her clear guileless blue eyes. There is a sound of running water—a twittering of birds amongst the trees—and then I wake to find what was once the reality of my existence, is now its romance—that like the days of my youth, the love of my youth is mine no more, and that though I were to revisit those scenes where I passed all the

happiest part of my life, I could never look upon them with the same eyes again as I did in the years the events of which seem all to be enacting over again as I sit, as I have said, on this Christmas Eve, looking at the miniature of a child—My First Love.

Oh, dear love, how well I remember that scorching Midsummer's-day when we became acquainted ; and as I recollect that your eyes were full of tears caused by the childish trouble out of which I tried to help you, my own brim over at the thought that the last time we met you were weeping—for very gratitude and thankfulness you said, darling—but your cheeks were pale and worn, love, by reason of the sorrow which had preceded that relief.

It all comes back to me not as a memory, but as a presence—there winds the country lane shaded by trees—I am approaching the bridge that spans the stream where such fine trout, all speckled and glistening, hide themselves beneath the stones, or dart after

the insects which settle for an instant on the water. The parapet of the bridge is low on the one side, and I can see the soft rich country landscape steeped in the summer sunshine, with the river—so low that one could almost cross it dryshod, for the bed is full of gravel and flint rocks, and large stones washed down by the winter's floods—trickling leisurely on its way. The wall on the other side is higher, and so covered with ivy, which has been trained to form a hedge on the top, that I cannot obtain even a peep into the grounds it conceals; but when I have nearly crossed the bridge, I hear a sudden cry, followed by bitter sobs, and a scream in a stronger voice for help.

“Hello!” I shouted, in reply.

“Oh! come—oh! please, please, do!” and thus entreated, I jumped over the low fence on the other side of the bridge, ran over the sloping green field to the water's edge, and was picking my steps under the

arch as best I could, when two children called out simultaneously with breathless anxiety,

“There—there—stop it.”

The “it,” was a bag—reticule is, I believe, the more correct term—floating past on a little current into which it had managed to drift. Where I was standing, the water scarcely seemed to ripple, but on the other side of the arch the stream really flowed rapidly, and before I could even strive to seize the bag, it was beyond my reach. For full five minutes I pursued that thing which seemed almost endued with life, so persistently did it elude all my attempts to capture it; but at length, when it caught in a bramble, the long straggling branches of which dipped into the stream, I succeeded in recovering the lost treasure.

It was hardly worth the wetting I got, or, at least, I thought so, as I looked at the dripping morsel of finery. It was knitted with fine blue purse silk, lined with white

*

satin, trimmed with blue cord and tassels, and the reader may consequently imagine what an effect the water had produced upon it. Reticules were the fashion in those days—if tight dresses remain in, the impossibility of pockets will bring them into fashion again before another Christmas comes round, and the wonderful pouches which my wife occasionally exhibits—declaring they belonged to her great-grandmother—heaven forgive her the implication—will come in for the girls who may be induced to use them, if only to prove they had a great-grandmother.

Whether or not, however, the partner of my joys can recollect reticules being commonly carried, my age and memory enable me to do so, and as I held the dripping article at arms' length, and watched the April shower it flung on the stream, I knew it would never be fit to show its face in polite society again.

However, that was not my fault. I had

done everything possible, and got very wet into the bargain, and I did not expect any further demands to be made upon my gallantry, when suddenly Joan—my sister—one of the children who had been making such an outcry, exclaimed,

“And now, Tom, how are we to dry it?”

I had reached the pair by this time—they were standing on a little promontory of gravel that stretched out into the stream—and looking down what seemed to me an immense distance—for I was tall of my age, and she but a wee bit of a thing—I saw for the first time Rose Surry, who, stretching out both her tiny hands for the bag, said, with her eyes full of tears, and her poor little heart still beating like that of a frightened bird—“Oh, sir, thank you very, very much!”

To Joan, I was only her big brother back from school for the holidays, but to this child I was a stranger, and something like a man, and her manner had that charming

hesitancy and shyness about it, which to me is just as delicious in a child as in a woman, and which seems doubly delicious now-a-days when neither women nor children are either hesitating or shy.

A fragile little creature, dressed all in white—she wore a soft white sun-bonnet, and a white muslin pelerine trimmed with lace, she had light cashmere boots, the toes of which were tipped with still lighter coloured leather, and she looked altogether as though she were just turned out of some dainty box lined with silver and tissue paper. Not a speck, not a soil on boots or dress.

Dolly, robed in state, and kept from contact from ordinary humanity, was never more immaculate than the little lady who thanked me with so innocent a grace, and looked at the drenched reticule so pitifully.

“How are we to dry it, Tom?” my sister repeated, and as she spoke I looked at her.

Now people said Joan Luttrell was pretty, and the making of a handsome girl; but for my part I must say she never in those days struck me as being other than a dark-haired, dark-eyed, gipsy-looking hoyden. She was not more than twelve years of age, yet she could fish, she could shoot, she could rob an orchard (ours), she could ride our youngest colt bare-backed, she could walk across the race, which supplied our mill, over a plank turned up on edge, she could climb trees, she could play marbles, she could eat more apples than all my brothers put together, and she was, in short, to quote the opinion of an old Scotchman in my father's employ, "The biggest deevil ever ran."

It was upon this, the eldest daughter of an impoverished race, I looked, after feast-ing my eyes upon the spotless little maiden with the golden hair.

There were nine of us—nine of us to be fed and clothed—so it may readily be

imagined that Joan's dress in no respect resembled that of Miss Surry. Joan wore an old silk skirt, which I well remembered as an ancient follower of our family. She had on, likewise, a black satin spencer, a sun-bonnet, made out of some cheap coloured print, and shoes fastened by a strap round the ankle. To say that Joan's personal appearance would have been improved by a thorough good wash, conveys but a small idea of her state. A gold-digger labouring in a perfectly fresh claim would have looked bright as silver by comparison with my sister. You could have tracked every mile of country she had been through by the different sorts of mud she wore upon her dress, like trophies. As usual, her hands were gloveless—also, as usual, her bonnet was a shapeless mass of calico—further, as usual, perfectly unconscious of, and careless concerning her own shortcomings, whilst fully alive to the perplexities of others, she asked, for the third time—

“How can we dry it, Tom?”

“We had better hang it on a branch in the sun,” I answered.

“That will not be half quick enough,” Joan declared. “Can’t we light a fire?”

“By the time we had done that the bag would be dry,” I replied—“besides, I have no matches.”

“I could soon run home and get a few,” Joan suggested.

“Could you not take the bag at the same time?” I suggested—“Peggy would dry it before the kitchen fire.”

“Well thought of, Tom,” Joan cried, clapping her sun-burnt hands like a schoolboy. “Give me the bag, and you stay with Rosie.”

But at this point Rosie interfered—Joan must not go—the bag could be hung up and dried in the sun—she was afraid to let it out of her sight again—“If mamma knew, she would be so angry—so angry,” and the poor little face began to work, and the lips

to quiver, and the blue eyes to fill, and she clung to Joan as if there were safety and protection in the presence of her undesirable-looking playfellow.

“ Shall I take it home ? ” I asked.

Considering I was but a lad, though a tall one, and that Rose Surry was only a little child, the reader will, I am sure, consider the offer to carry a dripping bag magnanimous. But even this my new acquaintance declined—rather, she took my hand, shyly, it is true, but still confidingly, and asked me also to remain.

Through the years, my darling, I am glad to think I did. It seems like yesterday that I was hanging the bag to the branch of an alder tree, and spreading the handkerchief it contained on the grass by the river side, with a stone at each corner, to prevent the light summer wind carrying it away. As I cross the stream, in order to reach the alder, I see the trout darting under the overhanging bank, where brambles,

and grass, and weeds, dipped into the water. There is a quiet stillness and silence all around; the cattle are lying in a newly-mown meadow, chewing the cud; in the further fields the haymakers are resting from their labour, and lying with their straw hats over their faces, or drinking beer under the shade of the hedgerows.

For ourselves, we find a cool place near the bridge, and sit down on the bank, with our feet resting on the gravel below. Joan has the bulk of the conversation to herself, and talks of many things, with the air of a professional—more especially, she enlarges upon the merits of some tame rabbits who have the misfortune to call her mistress, and descants on the exquisite beauty of a pair of bantams in a manner which makes Miss Surry open her eyes with eagerness and delight.

Further, Joan speaks at length about the perfections of a swing, out of which she has, to my certain knowledge, nearly broken her

neck on no less than four occasions since my return home, and finally she produces a handful of cherries, that I well know could only have been procured at the risk of life and limb, and, dividing them into three portions, presents Rose with the “one over,” and tells her not to let them touch her white dress.

After this we sit in silence for a time, solemnly devouring the spoil. I think about how soon my holidays will be ended, and fall into a reverie concerning some words my father let drop that very morning. Rose’s mind, I fancy, is wandering off to her bag; and as for Joan, her brain is plotting how she can safely procure a fresh supply of cherries, while she chuckles the stones into the stream, and tries vainly to hit a bird perched amongst the ivy, who regards her missiles and her endeavours with the coolest indifference.

Oh ! happy noontide ! Oh ! happy past !
Oh ! river rippling idly by—how is it ye

may never, for ever more, bear to me any treasures save those of memory ? Oh ! banks, woods, and hedgerows, gay with flower and blossom for the children, who with shouts and laughter, pluck your roses and gather your May, I could weep to think that never a spring nor summer may come upon the earth that shall bring to me aught save the withered garlands of a long ago past—faded leaves of the blue forget-me-not, that have been pressed in the innermost recesses of my heart, till my life has received their colour and their form, and can take no other imprint.

Amongst the stones the water trickled slowly on its way—in the distant fields the haymakers arose and resumed their toil and their labour until the evening—bright butterflies darted across the river, and great bees broke with their hum the silence of that summer's day—and Joan, having finished her cherries, picked her way across the stream, and reported that the bag was “dry as a bone.”

“I can’t get it down, Tom,” she shouted ; “come—I am not tall enough to reach the branch—I can only just touch the bag.”

Thus exhorted, I rose, and, as I did so, turned.

“Who is this lady, Rose ?” I asked.

Immediately Rose jumped up all in a tremble.

“It’s mamma—oh ! it’s mamma,” the poor child said, with such an unconscious dread in her tone, that my heart ached for her ; but she did not begin to cry ; she turned a little pale, yet stood her ground more bravely than from what I had seen of her I should have expected.

“Rose, what are you doing there ?” asked the lady, when she was within about half-a-dozen yards of us.

But Rose neither answered nor moved a step ; and still the lady came on. I can see her now—a fine, handsome, magnificently-formed woman, dressed in a light-grey silk dress, with a black velvet scarf round her shoul-

ders, and a straw bonnet, with wild roses outside, and lace and roses at each side of her face.

Looking at the scrap of net, and the beech leaf, and the tiny bow of ribbon, which constitutes the typical "bonnet of the period," wherein my wife at this moment makes her appearance, in order to request from me ten pounds, it really seems like romance, to think that "such things were," but handsome women looked well, and will look well in the head gear of all times, and to me, then unaccustomed to such wild luxury in attire, the approaching vision seemed something very beautiful and very terrible. Like Rose, I stood my ground, but I doubt whether Rose felt more afraid than I when the lady's glance fell upon me.

"How often, Rose, am I to tell you that I will not allow you to wander off in this way? Now never let me have to speak to you again about it."

"But nurse was busy, mamma, and I was so tired."

“Then you will have to learn not to be tired,” was the quick retort. “What would your papa say if he knew I had found you here, sitting by the river with all sorts of people. You are, perhaps, not aware, sir,” she added, turning to me, and uttering the “sir” with cutting sarcasm, “that you are at present on Sir Humphrey Surry’s grounds, and trespassing.”

“Oh! mamma!” Rose interrupted before I could frame a reply, “I dropped my bag—your bag I mean—into the river, and it floated away—away—and he brought it back for me and got so wet. He was crossing the bridge when I was swinging it about, and it flew out of my hand I do not know how.”

With the most perfect patience Lady Surry listened to this explanation, and at its close she turned to me and said—

“It appears then I have to thank you, and apologize for my remark; but, as you are young, I venture to tell you that a service

rendered, always seems the more valuable when it is not encroached upon afterwards."

I could not answer a word. I felt choking with rage and vexation, so without uttering a reply of any kind, I crossed the stream and unfastened the reticule, and having placed the handkerchief which Joan brought me within it, returned to the spot where Lady Surry stood watching my movements.

"Thank you," she said as she took the bag, and I know her tone would have been more civil to any one of the haymakers than it was to me. "And this young lady," if I could only convey the slightest idea of Lady Surry's look as she spoke those two words, the reader would better understand my feelings, "and this young lady, did she aid in the recovery of my reticule also?"

"No," Joan answered defiantly, "I was over there," indicating the field on the opposite side of the river, "and I saw

her," pointing to Rose, " and I came across."

"Perhaps you will have the kindness never to come across again," suggested Lady Surrey.

"You may be very sure I never will," Joan retorted with flashing eyes, and although I thought her speech rude, I must say I admired her courage.

"Good-bye," she went on, and she put out her brown hand towards Rose just as a man might have done.

It is wonderful what timid creatures will do on occasions. Though Lady Surry was standing there stern and terrible, Rose buried her little face in Joan's battered sunbonnet and kissed Joan's mouth, which was stained with cherry juice.

Seeing this, Lady Surry took her daughter's arm and bade her sharply, "Come away," but Rose was not to be frightened out of her politeness.

"Good-bye, sir, and thank you," she

said, giving me her disengaged hand, the left.

Next instant the little fingers were jerked out of my clasp, and with a haughty inclination Lady Surry swept off, dragging her daughter after her.

We watched them as they went, and could see that she was scolding Rose, and occasionally giving the arm she held that impatient shake which always indicates anger and temper ; but we could also see Rose once half turn back towards us, and wave her left hand.

Then they disappeared into the plantation, and Joan, drawing a long breath, said—

“Isn’t she a devil, Tom ?”

“My dear Joan,” I exclaimed, shocked, “where have you learned any expression like that ?”

“I heard papa say it,” she answered quite calmly. “He said Lady Surry was a devil —there now, Master Tom.”

I had no reason to doubt the correctness of Joan's assertion. My father was often given to the use of language not strictly clerical—as he himself remarked, he sometimes spoke in French—and I was therefore obliged to content myself with saying to Joan, that expressions which it was quite right for my father to employ were not suitable for her.

After that we crossed the stream, and went over the fields home together.

CHAPTER II.

ROSE'S PARENTS.

WHEN Sir Geoffry Surry lay a-dying, the only temporal question which troubled him was that without his consent and against his will, a fool who had married a rogue should succeed to the title.

Let a man be never so strict a conservative—and Sir Geoffry was conservative to the back bone—there is still enough of the original Adam left in him to induce radical tendencies on occasion. When an eldest son appears to be posting off to Pluto, or the next heir deals too freely in *post obits*, original sin crops up in the breast of even our

fine old English gentleman, and he wishes, spite of the laws of primogeniture and entail, that he could cut off the offender with a shilling, and reward, it may be, some prudent sneak with the title, and broad lands, and benefits thereto appertaining, and rents therefrom accruing.

Now Sir Geoffry was a conservative, but he was also human; therefore, when he found that he had no direct heirs, and that Humphrey Surry must *nolens volens* succeed to the baronetage, he cursed his day—made his will—and in due time—which to Humphrey seemed a long time—died.

After the funeral Sir Geoffry's will was read, and then the new baronet discovered that nothing his uncle could keep from him was left for his need. Old Court and say a paltry fifteen hundred a year went with the title, but Grayborough Castle and all the broad acres surrounding it, together with about six or seven thousand per annum, were bequeathed to my dearly beloved

brother Gilbert, " who will, I trust, in God's good time succeed to the title."

To Sir Humphrey this proved a blow, but to Matilda whom he had married, it was worse than a blow. In the visions of night she had beheld the towers of Grayborough —the deer on the lawn had been very pleasant possessions to her. It never once entered into her mind that Sir Geoffry, though he hated her, could visit that hatred on his next of kin—for Humphrey, a gentleman every inch, had refrained from informing her of the result of his only visit to his childless uncle.

" You are the first of our race," said the baronet, " who have brought a low-born woman amongst our mothers, wives, and daughters. As you have made your bed so you must lie on it. If love be worth anything, it will compensate you for the loss of family ties."

And then Humphrey Surry turned away, sick at heart, because he knew that it was

not for love of him, but for love of his belongings, for love of what he might eventually give her, that Matilda Berners had married him.

But as I have before said, he was a gentleman, and he kept his own counsel. He had made a mistake, as many a better man has done since, and there was no use in crying over spilt milk. Lady Surry was Lady Surry, and not all the wills in Christendom could undo that fact : so Sir Humphrey accepted his position, as well as the other fact that he was never likely to have any heir to come after him.

These things do happen so now and then amongst the upper ten thousand—possibly they happen just the same in the lower ten millions, but that property being an unknown quantity amongst the undistinguished many, no one cares to work out the difficult algebraic problem. Humphrey Surry's wife bore him five sons running—five—no less, to the intense disgust of childless Sir Geoffry

—for Gilbert had only one—a tall undeveloped stripling, at the time of his kinsman's death.

But the five died one after another, and then, after an interval, there was hope of an heir again. When the child came it was a daughter, and gossip said, Humphrey's wife turned her face to the wall and wept. The same year Sir Geoffry died. Six years afterwards, Sir Humphrey, having either paid or arranged his debts, came to Old Court with never an heir to inherit the title—but with Lady Surry, whom he had married once for love.

It came about in this wise : Hunting one day near Grayborough, Humphrey was thrown and badly injured. Kind but not far-sighted friends carried him to the abode of J. S. Berners, M.R.C.S., who saw to his hurts, and who had a handsome daughter. From the day he was borne across her father's threshold the fair Matilda marked him for her own, the spoil of her bow and of her spear.

She was engaged at the time—for such women do not lack lovers, more is the pity—to a certain Robert Childutt, who farmed a couple of hundred freehold acres, and had altogether been looked upon by the Berners family as rather a desirable catch for Tilly. But Tilly was above any low considerations, and regarded the obligations of a promise no more, or indeed, rather less than she regarded the necessity of curling her hair.

She knew she was handsome, her glass told her that, even had Mr. Childutt in his folly failed to do so; and there, in her father's first floor front bedroom lay a gentleman, heir to a baronetage, lacking a wife. Should this thing be suffered in Israel? Should she permit him to go away heart-whole? Assuredly not; and accordingly, as she, to quote Sir Geoffry, was a rogue and Humphrey a fool, they made a match of it, and had many children, amongst whom Rose was the only one who lived.

To state that her mother disliked Rose,

would be to convey too mild an idea of her feelings. She hated her.

“Had I only known,” Mrs. Surry was overheard to say, “I would have managed accordingly, and had a boy.” But at the time she never dreamed of a girl’s advent, and Rose’s coming was as unlooked for as unwelcome.

Not to her father, however—he did not so much mind whether his boy or Gilbert’s succeeded to the title. Long years of matrimony had done their work, and Humphrey Surry was happily indifferent as to who or what came after him.

He had played his game and failed—for him life was over. If only his wife would have left him and Rosy alone!—well, every existence has its “if only,” and Sir Humphrey did not care greatly. He was a fool as his uncle had broadly stated, and Providence is very good to fools. Out of the abysses of their own folly comfort comes to them—out of Sir Humphrey’s abyss there came Rose.

When his wife was dissatisfied, and

creditors pressing, Sir Humphrey found a certain pleasure in the sight of his daughter's face—in the clasp of her childish arms. It is a poor life that in which a man disappointed of the chief blessing life can offer—a woman's devotion—a woman's sympathy—turns to the affection of the children, who ought merely to serve as a tie binding husband and wife closer together.

For me—there will be hundreds, thousands of people, this Christmas time, ready to say I am a heathen for advancing the opinion—though my opinion is, God knows, the truth—whenever I see a man disappointed in his marital relations taking comfort out of his children, and seeking his companionship with them, I always think of a lonely woman I broke in upon one morning unexpectedly, and found nursing a cat, all the time that her eyes—Lord comfort her!—were fixed upon the fire—seeing, it might be, therein the ghost of a dream never realized, of a hope never fulfilled.

After all, there is nothing but a woman can fill a man's heart.

I know that—I who, now surrounded by wife and children, sit beside my Christmas hearth with mine empty.

My love—yes—you are my wife, and, according to your light, have done your duty, and were you to die to-morrow, I should be very, very sorry, and never marry again—but you have never filled the vacant corner, for all that—never cured the dull, aching pain, through the years which have come and gone.

My dears, kiss me! you are my children—but you are not hers.

If you had, you might have been different, and I too. Don't marry in a hurry, and don't marry excepting for love.

It is not bad Christmas advice this, friends. When you are kissing under the mistletoe, young folks, remember what I have told you. When you see young Corydon, Paterfamilias, decoying your Phillis

under the Druidical branch, be not overswift to advance the claims of that highly respectable other individual, whose suit you approve—but rather leave the young folks alone, and if Corydon have no grievous sin bearing witness against him, and can show that he is able and willing to work for the support of his wife, in God's name let them marry.

As the Pharisees in olden times were rebuked because they rejoiced as not being as that Publican, so I always doubt the woman who blesses the fate that represents to her shortsightedness the Maker of the universe, which interposed to prevent her mating with Frank, the ne'er do well—with Harry the black sheep.

She is fat, and unsentimental, this typical matron whom I remember, full of romance, and with a waist I could have spanned ; she has daughters she will marry to the highest bidder, and sons she would taboo if they made love where there was no prospect of

settlements. But oh ! friends, all holy, wholesome, unworldly love is now sour grapes to her—and it is but her feminine instincts which prompt her to make the best of the mistake, and to perpetuate the error.

Evil, be thou my good ! Mammon be thou my God ! cry these women, who have gone from Dan to Beersheba, and found all barren ; and the cry is echoed by those who seeing them outwardly prosperous, and apparently happy, behold the rind of the Dead Sea apples, and know nothing of the dust and the ashes, the decay and the rottenness, lurking within. After which not digression, but statement of opinion, I may return to my story, and tell it.

CHAPTER III.

OUR VISITOR.

THE courteous and patient reader must not suppose that I learned all the facts contained in a previous chapter in a moment. On the contrary, I have concentrated into a few pages the information of years. What we knew best at my father's house in those days was that the residents at Old Court were, for their station, very poor—that Rose's nurse had likewise to officiate as Lady Surry's maid—that indoors they could afford in the way of male servants only a butler, whilst as regarded the stables, coachman and groom—the latter turned occasionally

into a footman—were the only retainers employed.

Sir Humphrey had no other country seats and therefore, when he went shooting, was compelled to do so at the instance of kindly friends. He sat in the house ; but when he went to town was obliged either to go without Lady Surry, or else to stay at the residence of a widowed sister, who was willing to put up with the inconvenience of having them, for the sake of the Bart. and M.P. attached to his name. Lady Surry flattered the old lady's vanity. She did not snub the pug dogs in Devonshire Place as she was wont to do her only child Rose, whom she left at Old Court, in charge of an individual half housekeeper, half cook. Lady Surry was still young enough and personable enough, to flirt, and she did flirt, though unbeknown to Miss Surry—only, unhappily, nothing came of it. She failed to leave Sir Humphrey free, and Sir Humphrey still regarded

her with consideration, if not with love, as “my young wife,” though Lady Surry was nine-and-thirty, if she were a day, having been nearly twenty-three when she made her matrimonial venture—and won.

But all this time I am wandering from my tale. It was a lovely summer’s evening when, just as we were about commencing tea, Joan entered our sitting-room leading by the hand Rose Surry.

We were not wealthy people, as has been already intimated, so we lived plainly, dining all together at one o’clock, and assembling again round the tea-table at six—therefore we must have seemed quite a party to the child, who drew back a little, and would have retreated altogether had Joan not dragged her forward.

“It is Rose Surry,” commenced my sister, “I brought her in to tea, mamma.”

“But, my dear, you know Lady Surry —” our mother was beginning, when a look at the poor little tender face cut her sentence

short. "Will you sit beside me, love?" she went on, all her maternal instincts astir at sight of the child's clinging gentleness: "Joan, take off her bonnet." Which Joan did, like a matron of forty, finishing up the performance with a kiss, and the remark, "There, my queen."

I never beheld anything like Joan's love for that child. She waited upon her like a slave, and would have given Rose her own portion of jam, as well as that my mother heaped on the stranger's bread, only Rose said she could not eat it.

And indeed the child ate very little, but after the first few minutes seemed, in her quiet way, to be supremely happy amongst us all. She took especially to my father, sitting on his knee and pulling his grey moustache, and laughing merrily when he told her she was a saucy little puss, and said she did not know her own name.

"Rose, indeed—Lily, you mean," persisted my father.

“Mamma calls me Rose, and papa Posie, and nurse Plague,” she explained gravely.

“And why Plague?” asked my mother; and at this question the child lifted her large soft eyes and looked at my mother earnestly, but answered never a word.

“Why Plague, darling?” repeated my mother, and she stooped down her head to hear the reply.

Then Rose stretched up her little arms and clasped them round my mother’s neck, while she whispered, “Because she never has time to take me out, and I go by myself, and then when she finds me she says I am the plague of her life.”

“But don’t you think you are naughty to go by yourself, and make nurse unhappy?” asked my father.

“No,” she answered. “I have no one to play with, and nothing to do; and then, if I can get to the river sometimes I see Joan.”

“Did you see Joan at the river this even-

ing?" my mother inquired—for she had heard the episode of Lady Surry's reticule, and was prepared to rebuke Joan if she found that young lady had been breaking rules, and trespassing on Sir Humphrey's property.

"Yes," Joan broke in at this juncture, "I was on one side of the bridge, and saw Rosie on the other, and called to her, and she came. Her mamma is in Wales, and she had been there all the afternoon by herself, so I brought her home. You won't catch me going into their place again," and Joan's voice was uplifted, and Joan's eyes sparkled, and my dear mother said—

"You must not speak in such a tone," and my father exclaimed "Hush, hush, hush!"

After that the conversation languished, and it was proposed we should all go into the garden, where Rose, holding my hand, partook of some gooseberries which Joan gathered, and subsequently recounted for

my benefit a fairy tale, considering evidently that she was bound in courtesy to amuse and instruct me.

We stood in a fairy land then, sweetest, though neither of us knew it—in the bright, innocent, happy, fairy land of youth and inexperience.

“Where did that all happen, Rose?” I asked when she had done.

“I do not know,” she answered, “but ever so far away from here.”

My love, there came a day when I reminded you of that fairy-tale, and asked you the same question again, and you replied, darling—“It all happened in this garden, Tom, and the prince and princess are you and me.”

“We did not know anything about love in those days, Rose,” I whispered.

“Ah! Tom, we were children, then,” you said, and, God help us, we were little better than children in our happiness when you uttered that profound remark—nothing

more, love — wandering along the grass paths, which were damp, I remember, and covered (it was in the early spring time) with blossoms from the apple-trees.

It was moonlight, and we thought such a moon had never sailed through the sky before. For my own part, I have not seen such a night since, and believe it is a different sky and a different moon from that we beheld standing in my father's garden I look up at as I pace back from my chambers to the domestic hearth where all my earthly happiness is now centred.

Supposing, however, a man have once lived in fairy land, he cannot, even though he be the happy husband of an estimable wife, and the proud father of handsome children, always refrain from dreaming dreams and seeing visions. In the midst of the prosaic city, before his mental sight there flits ever and anon the "rath" where the "little people" dwelt, the green ring where they danced in the summer nights.

Recollection is always summer to some, friends. To those who have spent a happy youth the roses of the past bloom perennially—there is always a perfume of mignonette and pinks, always broad patches of sunshine lying athwart the landscape, always a glitter on the sea, leaves on the trees, the songs of birds in the air, fruits clustering in the orchard.

The past comes back so to me, God be thanked. Though the autumnal breezes blew, and the frosts and sorrows of winter came, still my life held bloom and flower once, the memory of which no future can destroy. And even while my eyes fill while writing and thinking of the long ago, it is not with bitter tears, but with drops wrung from the knowledge that although my life might have been less miserable had I never loved and lost, it would have proved less happy too.

After a time my mother came out to spoil Rose's enjoyment.

“They will be anxious about you at Old Court, pet,” she said, “and I must now send you home. Tom, you had better take her.”

“Let me go too, mamma,” Joan cried, but my dear mother negatived that proposal, to my intense delight—for if I were to run the gauntlet of entering Old Court, and proffering an explanation, I did not want to do so in Joan’s company.

Very soon Miss Rose, wrapped up in a warm scarf, was trudging with me down the lane home. Although our places almost adjoined, the entrance lodges of Old Court were a good mile from our cottage, and I had not the slightest intention of taking my charge home by any back gate. She urged me to do so, indeed, adding as an inducement the fact that “mamma was not at home,” which speech gave me but a poor idea of Rosie’s notions on the score of morality; whereupon I considered it my duty to give her a lecture concerning the sinful-

ness of doing behind a person's back what she would not do before her face—in the middle whereof Rose began to whimper, and I to fear I had produced too strong an impression.

“What is it, dear?” I asked, for I had not meant to be cross with her, only from the height of my teens to preach to her inexperience.

“I am tired,” she said in reply, “so tired! Is it very far home now?”

“Shall I carry you?” I proposed.

“Yes, please,” and the little arms were upstretched, and I took the light burden in mine, and so carried her all the remainder of the way to her father's house. She did not go to sleep; she just lay there quietly, looking up at the sky, with her bonnet fallen back, and her soft golden hair stirred by the evening breeze.

“Do I tire you?” she asked once; “do your arms ache?”

“With carrying you!” I said; “why

you are light as as a feather, I could carry you from here to London."

"I wish you would, then," she answered, "I want to see the King and Queen sitting with crowns on their heads and fur on their shoulders—musn't they be grand!"

"I am going to London after a time," I said a little proudly, because in those days it was something to visit the metropolis. But immediately I had spoken my heart sank, for that very day it had come to me that I ought not to go; and I was even then making up my mind to do what my father wished, at any personal cost, at any personal sacrifice.

But what he had asked was just my future, just that and nothing more. Perhaps it would have been better had he taken it then altogether, and done therewith what he listed.

"Is Joan going too?" Rose asked; whereupon I, being rather in a pedantic frame of mind, undertook to prove to her that it was

only men who went from home, and not little girls, or indeed girls at all (were I talking to Rose now on this point, I wonder what I should have to tell her), and I enlarged upon this theme, until probably Rose wearying of it, told me I was not a man, but a boy.

After that, thinking her a trifle rude, and considering that the greater the truth the greater was the libel, I remained silent, till she brought me back to a better state of mind, by saying—

“ You are not cross, Tom, are you ? ”

“ Cross, Rosie ! no,” I answered ; and then she nestled her soft face up against mine, and the shade of Sir Humphrey’s trees closed over us as I carried her up the avenue home.

We had not been long in making acquaintance. Already I was Tom to the child ; already she was as much a part of my life as Joan, or Cecil, or Harry, or Ethel, or any of the other progeny residing in our

unpretentious house. Whatever I might do in the future, wherever I might go, I could never forget blue eyes and golden hair, who lay in my arms with hands clasped round my neck, whispering, "I love you, Tom." Oh ! my darling.

I had never been to Old Court before, and the shadow which seemed to have flitted thither with me deepened in intensity as we drew near Rosie's home. What I was to say, how explain my advent, I could not imagine, and we had already reached the front door before any suitable form of address presented itself.

Then, while I was waiting for some one to come in answer to my knock, I framed this sentence—

"Miss Surry came home with my sister to tea, and thinking the family might be uneasy, I have brought her back."

But the "best laid plans o' mice and men" fall through sometimes, and my sentence fell through, by reason of Rose ex-

claiming the moment a solemn elderly butler opened the door—

“It is only me, Hoskins,” (the darling’s acquaintance with Lindley Murray was at that time imperfect). “I have been up with Mr. Luttrell’s papa and mamma, and I do not want any tea, thank you—I have had my tea. Put me down on the table, please, Tom”—this last clause to me.

I crossed the dark old-fashioned hall, and set my maiden on a substantial oak table, where she curled up her legs, and at once assumed airs of command that I could not have believed she had courage to indulge in.

“Where’s nurse, Hoskins?” asked missy, nursing her pretty boots.

“Crying about you, miss,” answered the butler; “she has sent Carnett to look for you, thinking you were lost.”

“Lost!” repeated the autocrat contemptuously, “why how could I be lost, Hoskins? I must always be somewhere.”

“Which you must, miss,” agreed Hoskins.

“I am going now,” I broke in at this juncture; “will you bid me good night?” I said this very humbly, for the house and the man servant, who, I fancied, looked as if he knew something greatly to my disadvantage, had proved too much for my equanimity. There was a gulf placed between us and these people who owned Rose, and no one save Joan—Joan, in her mad disregard of consequences,—would have tried to cross it.

“Good night, Tom,” answered Rose, holding up her mouth to be kissed, but at that moment a side-door flew open, and a woman appeared, who embraced Rose, calling her “duck, and pet, and lamb, and treasure,” and asking “where she had dropped from,” adding, “poor nursey has been crying her eyes out.”

“Why don’t you say I am the plague of your life?” asked Rosie, solemnly.

“Because, my sweet lamb, I thought you were really lost this time. I have been out

the last two hours looking for you, and now Carnett is gone—”

“To walk with Phœbe,” finished Rose, with that demure archness which belongs to the sex, when speaking about love affairs, long before they have attained to the knowledge of good and evil.

Once again I essayed to get away, but Rosie held me fast, while she introduced me to her nurse with the words, “*He* brought me home.”

“And I am sure, sir, it was very kind of you indeed, and we are all obliged, and where, please, did you find Miss Rose?”

“Find!” repeated Miss Rose; “I never went to any place to be found—Joan took me to her house for tea—that was all.”

“My sister is very fond of Miss Surry,” I explained, “but she ought not to have tempted her away from home.”

“I wish my lady would let Miss Rose have anybody to play with,” the nurse answered; “for the child is moped up and

lonely here all day by herself"—and from this speech I knew that Rosie's guardian, in her mother's absence, would not even try to prevent the pair meeting. And after all, what did it matter whether they did or not, so long as it was Rosie, who, like a stray pheasant, wandered into my father's grounds from Sir Humphrey's plantations?

"You would like to return by the river walk, should you not, sir?" said Hoskins, as I passed through the hall-door. "I will get you the key of the gate leading on to the bridge, and you can send it back any time. That way saves full three quarters of a mile."

But I declined this offer, telling him I should like the walk, and so I passed down under the arching trees that made the avenue dark and lonesome.

It was not too dark and lonesome, however, for Miss Phœbe and Mr. Carnett, whom I met strolling lovingly along together—she with her head almost touching

his shoulder, he with his arm passed round her waist.

I should not have thought it necessary to disturb their *tête-à-tête* had Carnett himself not called out to know who I was, and what I was doing there at that time of night.

In reply, I informed him I was returning from the Court, having just taken Miss Surry back there.

“It will be a relief to you to know she is safe, and that you need not trouble yourself to look for her any longer,” I added, whereupon Phœbe giggled, and Mr. Carnett muttered something about having heard at the Lodge that a gentleman had brought her home.

When I got near our own house, my father met me, smoking, as was his wont, a short pipe, cigars being a luxury our means did not permit.

“Well, my boy,” he began, after we had walked a few steps together, “will you consider what I said to you this morning—carefully Tom, remember?”

“I have considered, father,” I answered, “and I have decided to stay at home and try and do my best.”

He took a whiff or two more before he said, laying his hand on my shoulder, “God bless you, Tom.”

CHAPTER IV.

OUR OWN HOME.

LOOKING back over the past, with eyes that are now sharpened by knowledge of the world, I do not wonder at Lady Surry considering us very common people, who had no right to come between the wind and her nobility.

We were not rich, and although we were of respectable family, there had never, so far as I know, been any member composing it very great or very grand. Of course there had been a time in our annals, as there is usually a time in the annals of those who can talk confidently about a great-grand-

father, when the Luttrells were well-to-do—when they owned a fair amount of landed property, associated with county gentry, and rode to the meet of the Darfordshire hounds, on their own hacks, and cried “Tally Ho!” from the backs of their own hunters.

They had a pretty, old-fashioned mansion, away in Darfordshire. I have seen it within the last ten years—surrounded by hideous gardens, laid out principally in the Dutch style—where the flower-beds were bordered by box, and the old yew trees artistically trimmed into the similitude of peacocks, lions, griffins, and other animals.

The property is now in the possession of a very worthy knight, who was at one time Lord Mayor of London, and who made all his money in trade. He has thrown out wings, and added many architectural abominations, but he had the sense to leave the old house overgrown with ivy intact, and he still nourishes the yew trees, and has

them trimmed and cut as above described—under the impression, perhaps, that people may think his ancestors planted them.

Not that it matters much who planted them now, or if they had never been planted, for that matter, but they please Sir William, and constituted one great reason why he purchased the place. His yearly income is larger than the entire principal of the Luttrells in their palmiest days, so I have good reason for saying that even in the heyday of their prosperity my people were never anything very particular.

They belonged to the rank-and-file of the upper middle-class. With either wealth or brains, they might have become colonels, generals, commander-in-chiefs in that social army—but they had neither. They had not even sense enough to go into trade, which was, perhaps, so far fortunate, since, with their lack of cleverness, commerce would infallibly have hurried them even quicker down the hill than they posted of their own accord.

I know a certain Luttrell now, one of the lineal descendants of the Darfordshire family—not a mere offshoot of that race, like myself—who is something in a Government office, and who barely earns enough to keep himself, and a delicate wife, and three sickly-looking children, off the parish.

This man has no money beyond his salary, and never had any—neither had his father before him, neither had his wife, nor his wife's father. His ancestors were no greater folk than I have described them—he has no land—he has no particular position—and he grows nothing but an imbecile moustache, which looks a degree more purposeless than himself. Yet he never fails to tell me, on those not rare occasions, when he wants the loan of a five-pound note, that no gentleman should go into business.

“It is only fit for snobs and cads,” he declares ; and were he not such a poor creature, I should be unable to refrain from

telling him, "It is certainly not fit for fools."

For me, I am not in trade ; I have never been, but for a very short period of my life. Yet I hold trade to be as necessary to the very existence of a true aristocracy, as food to that of a man. For a pauper aristocracy is in its very nature an anachronism, and I should like to know how, except in trade, or by trade, sufficient money is now-a-days to be obtained to keep blue blood circulating through the social system. Men cannot go freebooting, or marauding, or looting now, excepting in business, and it is quite a question, I think, whether even a modern "promoter" is not quite as respectable and honest a member of society as a "Reiver" used to be in the good old days when "might was right."

All of which merely brings me to the point I wanted to reach long ago, namely, that had the Luttrells been clever enough to turn their attention to commerce, and

amass wealth—without, at the same time, losing all command over their H's—even Lady Surry might have been disposed to make herself agreeable.

But we were poor, and, however novelists and poets may idealize poverty, there is nothing so awfully prosaic as a small income and nine fine children.

People were, indeed, kind enough to hint we were fine children, but that only made the matter worse, for our good health induced large appetites, while the animal spirits of the younger fry were for ever leading them into places where they tore their clothes, and whence they returned home sorry, ragged sights to behold.

In his early days my father had been an officer. It was quite like the Luttrells, to put their sons in positions where they could not possibly live on the pay allotted to them. The Luttrells, and such as they, replenish the earth with curates, ensigns, briefless barristers—who write for the press

—civil servants, secretaries, and so forth, and in conformity with the plan of his family, and their tribe, my father entered the army.

After he married Bertha Harrison, who, of course, had not a sixpence, he sold out, paid his debts, and looked about for employment in London, which he failed to get. Time went by—children came, but money went ; and had it not been for the kindness of a widowed aunt, who lived in great splendour in Queen Anne Street, with a maid, a cook, a footman, a housemaid, a butler, a cat, a parrot, a King Charles and an Italian greyhound, there can be no question but that a climax would have arrived sooner than actually proved the case.

But though deferred, the climax came, and, at the earnest invitation of George, by the grace of God, my father found himself seated one evening at Mr. Sloman's hospitable board, inditing an epistle first to his aunt, and secondly to a certain Colonel

Montgomery, who had always been his great chum, and who, it was whispered, had run an almost neck-and-neck race with him in Bertha Harrison's good graces.

Be this as it may, both Colonel and aunt came to the rescue, and somehow affairs were arranged. After that, however, came the important question as to how he was to live, and Colonel Montgomery offered him the lease of a farm which had just fallen in, near Crommingford, without any fine, which offer being gratefully accepted, Mrs. Graham agreed to lend him one thousand pounds to stock it, and thus enabled to begin the world afresh, my father turned his back on London.

He would have done well, I think, at Crommingford, but for two, or, indeed three, drawbacks; the first was, that my mother knew nothing whatever of the duties of her new position, and never could learn them, wherefore the making of the butter, the manufacturing of the cheese, the rearing of

the calves, the care of the poultry, was left entirely to servants.

There was no mistress's eye about our establishment to put meat on the horse's ribs—and indeed how could there be? said my poor father once to me, almost apologetically, when she was constantly bringing children into the world?

Which was all very well and very nice of him to recollect; but I know now quite well that if my mother had never had a child, she would have proved just as useless a wife for a struggling farmer as was the case.

The second drawback to my father's prosperity—I will not say happiness, because it would grieve me to think he had been otherwise than happy—were the number of arrows contained in his matrimonial quiver: think of it—there were nine of us, and I but sixteen.

Three, two older and one younger than myself, had died; but there were nine living—

nine, and Joan the eldest girl. It was a blessing we lived in the country, and were, so to speak, our own tradespeople, for had we resided in a town, and been compelled to buy bread, and milk, and beef, and beer, it would have taken a fortune to support us. As it was, we fattened and thrived, and there was neither sickness within our house, nor scarcity within our gates.

But there was a trouble, which arose in this way, and caused my father many and many a sleepless night and wretched day.

On the farm at Crommingford there were two small flour mills, one that had happily been burnt permitted to fall into ruin, and another that, unfortunately, was in a perfect state of repair.

At the time he took possession of the farm, the latter mill was rented by a man of the name of Telfer, who managed in a small way to make a living out of it. When he died, my father took the mill into his own hands, and worked it not unprofitably.

In an evil hour, however, some one suggested to him, or the idea suggested itself, that two mills might be as easily worked as one, and that it was a thousand pities for the water-wheel on the lower pond to be standing still. He had got a little money before him by this time, and so commenced building.

Now everybody knows what commencing building means, namely the commencement of trouble; and so my father found it. An acquaintance had assured him that the place might be put into working order again for an old song; but the song turned out ultimately a most mournful ditty. Further, when the mill was rebuilt, my father discovered that the same rule holds good with regard to business as with regard to hens. Say that six hens lay on an average two eggs a week each, any inexperienced person might assume that thirty-six would produce six dozen—but practically this is found to be a fallacy; and in like manner the profits

obtained by a man in a large way of business bear no proportion whatever to the amount made by one trading in a smaller and more modest manner.

Moreover the rebuilding and fitting up cost him just double what he had anticipated, and as if to crown his misfortunes within a month of the time when he had, as he thought, made a most desirable arrangement, which would give him time to pay the people to whom he owed money, down came a letter from Mrs. Graham's solicitors, demanding the return of the thousand pounds she had lent him ten years previously.

“That is because we would not let her have Joan,” said my mother tearfully, for Mrs. Graham had desired my charming sister as an addition to her olio of oddities.

“I scarcely think so,” answered my father, and he wrote to the solicitors, explaining that the interest having been regularly paid, he felt much surprised at their request. He went on say, that it would put

him to grevious inconvenience having to raise so large a sum of money within the time specified, six months ; that he was anxious to do what he could in the matter, but trusted, as he was already heavily burdened, that they would agree to take the amount in four yearly instalments of two hundred and fifty pounds each, interest to be paid at the same rate as before, five per cent.

To this in due course he received a most unsatisfactory reply. Mrs. Graham, having been given to understand that he had been spending large sums of money on property which he merely held on lease, did not feel inclined to leave her thousand pounds, for which she held no sufficient security, in his hands any longer. She had instructed her solicitors further to remark, that as my parents had not evinced any willingness to meet her wishes in a matter on which she had set her heart, she should certainly not consider their desires now. All of which,

being translated, meant that if they still liked to send up Joan to Queen Anne Street, labelled "glass, with care," she would reconsider her decision, and probably never ask for the thousand pounds again.

It was a temptation, certainly, but my parents did not yield. They had old-fashioned notions, and considered it would be very like selling or abandoning Joan to give her to Mrs. Graham. God had intrusted her to them, and if so long as they lived they neglected that trust, how should they answer to Him for it in the day when He made up his jewels. Further, duty apart, they could not send her from them. They loved Joan, and all their children, and, as my mother said to me once when speaking on this matter—

" You must remember, Tom, we had lost three, so we understood what it was—but I knew those three were safe, and I did not know whether Joan would be safe; that made all the difference."

I am only recounting facts as they happened, and do not propose to pass judgment on them. Possibly my parents were wrong. No doubt it would have been a fine thing for them to have had one child fed, clothed, and educated free of expense, and with the prospect of a good dot in addition ; but still, I think if any person, whether old maid or widow, whether “King of France, or, far better, Pope of Rome,” were to come and ask me for one of my blessings, I should feel inclined to reply uncivilly.

Nobody, however, ever did want one of my children, and I shrewdly suspect, no one ever wanted their mother but myself—and I did not, though I married her. Some young men, I notice, are now beginning to loom about our house, and I suppose some day the “old story” will be told me by a new narrator. When my girls are “wanted” in that way I shall probably not say nay, and I do not think I shall be difficult to satisfy pecuniarily. Nevertheless, I do not envy

the future of the happy man who unites with any one of the blessings of my hearth and home, unless he send her first to a school for cookery ; and second, to one of those ladies who advertise patterns for eighteenpence, and give instruction in dressmaking. If, further, he can induce her to learn arithmetic, and comprehend that there are only twenty shillings in a pound, and that an income of five hundred a year will not enable people to live honestly at the rate of a thousand, I think he might go further and fare worse.

These are, however, a good many ifs to be leapt in the race matrimonial, and, perhaps, though I doubt it, he might find another wife who would not require to go through such a course of education as I have indicated.

Excuse me, most courteous reader, these discursive remarks. Although the past is present with me, the present will intrude, and crop up between me and the story I have undertaken to tell. Where was I ?—

oh! talking about Joan, who remained on at the paternal mansion to become the hoyden I have described, and to make me acquainted with Rose Surry.

For which I shall be for ever grateful to Joan, who is now a great lady, happy in her husband, her children, her position, and herself.

We do not meet very often now, Joan and I, for there are certain memories we still wot of that have never been decently laid out, and shrouded, and coffined, and buried, and forgotten. No—only sometimes, when she is in London, and can spare time from her calls and parties, and other duties (they are duties) incident to her position, she drives over to the Temple in a quiet single-horse brougham, which she leaves in Essex Street, and then walks across Devereux Court, and so to Pump Court, where she will sit with me for an hour, while her coachman, who is of a literary turn of mind, reads *Lloyd's Newspaper*, and sometimes,

when he is *quite* sure no one can see him (but I have done so, crossing from Little Essex Street), indulges in a modest half-pint, nay, even adventures on a cigar.

Joan will not visit my wife now, for there was once a deadly war waged between them, and Joan cannot quite forget. But she asks madam and my daughters to her assemblies, where they have an opportunity of seeing everybody who has ever done anything, and, if they were of a reflective turn of mind, which they are not, of considering how exceedingly like ordinary mortals great folks are.

For me, I do not go to Joan's grand parties, because, for one thing, I do not like parties, and in the next, I do not like her husband; although, mark you, were I in trouble, pecuniary or otherwise, there is not a man on earth to whom I would as soon turn in my distress as to him. And, on the other hand, if sorrow fell on him, I know he would come straight away to my office

and say, "Luttrell, you tried to help me once—will you do so again?"

There are different kinds of friendship, and there is one which takes the form of not wanting to see your friend every half hour through the day. That is our form—and if you wish to know why, I will tell you as this story proceeds.

But not just now, because I am going back to the mills and Mrs. Graham.

The latter lady, I shall always believe, thought that my father would never be able to raise the money, and that out of sheer desperation he would give her Joan, to whom she had taken a fancy when she was staying with us a year previously. She knew Colonel—now General—Montgomery was in India, and like most rich people who live selfish and isolated lives, she forgot that it is just upon the cards a poor man may, in the course of years, make some friend willing and able to help him at a pinch.

This some one my father knew, and turned to in his distress. He had turned to him for advice over the debts incurred on that wretched mill, and now he went to him for help, which was given.

But my father was an honourable man, and, knowing his friend could not afford to risk the amount he offered him, namely, two thousand pounds, which should enable him to clear off everybody, and start in life again for the third time, he went to a lawyer, in order to inquire what security he could offer that might protect his creditor against loss.

To this the lawyer—honest, perhaps, but short-sighted—answered, “Insure your life, and give him a bill of sale.” Which was just about equivalent to saying, “Put yourself in a pan of scalding water for the remainder of your life,” only, unhappily, my father did not see this. He insisted actually, against his creditor’s desire, on giving him a bill of sale over every sheep

he owned, horse he had reared, hen he had hatched—over his ricks in the farm yard, and his implements, carts, furniture, dairy-utensils, garden-tools, and so forth. The stock being changeable, would have been, of course, no earthly security in the hands of a different individual, but my father looked upon the whole affair as a matter of honour, and if he sold a bullock, replaced it—if he parted with a stack of hay, duly acquainted Mr. Reemes, his friend, with the fact.

But what did not that bill of sale do for us? It destroyed our credit just as completely as if we had been bankrupt—aye more, because a bankrupt did in those days re-enter the world a free man and that accursed document kept us bonds-men and bondswomen till the uttermost farthing had been paid.

And to pay with a heavy life-insurance premium added was not easy. Well—God help us—when the end came, which did

come, no man could say my father had wronged him of a penny, or that he had lost a shilling by him. Further, he reared us all respectably, and taught us to live honestly and virtuously, and we were happy. Yes, I am grateful to remember that, though I sometimes wish I had been able to contribute more towards that happiness, and better content to live and die “the jolly miller of Dee.”

Still time went on—it always does go on—and my father, struggling heavily with his anxieties, greeted me on my return from the school where, after much difficult studying of ways and means, he had placed me—with a welcome cheery and loving as ever.

It was the summer when my story opens, and I had then been at school two years and a half, studying my best, and making good progress. Not knowing the state of the farming finances, I had desired to become a barrister; and my father, who was proud as well as fond of me, said I should follow the

bent of my inclination, and become famous yet.

I fancy my mind must have been much older than my years, for I can remember even then having visions of the great things destiny had in store for me.

There was no height to which in my ambitious dreamings I did not climb. To inexperience the path to success seems always easy. There were no stones, no briars, no lurking disappointment, no pelting showers of opposition and discouragement along the road I mentally travelled. I beheld myself wealthy and renowned, I pictured myself addressing a jury, I heard my own voice uplifted in the House of Commons. I do not think I was more vain or more conceited than most lads who have not yet found their level, but I must have possessed a certain consciousness of my own power to work, and succeed by reason of that power, and I used to wander about the fields during my summer holidays, dreaming

my dreams, and building castles in the air too grand for any mortal ever to inhabit.

But by degrees there seemed to fall a mist over these fairy palaces. I could not now tell at what precise hour a cloud appeared first to flit over the surface of my future sky. I felt it was there, rather than beheld it. The air seemed to grow suddenly chilly. Like the “keld” ruffling the serenity of a Cumberland tarn, there came over me something which caused me to know, dimly it may be, but still surely, that life could never prove to mortal like a fairy tale, wherein the flowers never withered, and sorrow never entered, and the trees remained green all the year—wherein men never grew feeble nor women old.

I do know, however, when the storm first broke—when the magic glass was shivered, and the dear illusion dispelled—namely, on the afternoon of the day when I saw Rose Surry home.

“Tom,” said my father, coming to me

where I was preparing my tackle for the next morning's fishing—"Tom, I want to speak to you seriously for five minutes. You are old enough now to make a friend of, and I mean to talk to you like a friend, as well as a son, my boy."

"What is it, father?" I asked, anxiously, for the sky seemed suddenly to darken over, and life in a moment to assume a very different aspect indeed. "What is the matter? I will try to be worthy of your trust if you only tell me how to make myself so."

"Stop," he answered, "do not promise till you hear what it all means," and then he went on to repeat what I have already told, with this addition—"My health, Tom, is not what it was, and I have been thinking the matter over seriously. Suppose anything happened to me, what would become of your mother, and brothers, and sisters? If you still adhere to your intention of becoming a barrister, years and

years must pass before you can earn a penny ; whereas, if you could only be content to remain at home, you might at a moment's notice step into my shoes, if at any future time the necessity arose, besides being of the greatest assistance to me in the present."

I did not speak—I could not speak. I beheld my dream castle, like a mist wreath, vanishing away. Instead of doing great things for my family, I saw myself plodding on year after year—year after year—a farmer—a miller.

I was young, and the sacrifice seemed great ; but I loved my father, and so, after a silence, during the continuance of which my disappointment seemed to be choking me, I said—"I would do whatever he liked."

"No, Tom," he replied, "I will not take that answer. I do not want you to remain at home merely because I tell you to do so. You must think the matter over, and decide for yourself. It is a great deal to give up—but it is also a great deal to be able to

accomplish. It shall be just as *you* like, Tom, after you have thought the matter over."

And I did think it over—all the afternoon—all the time Rosie was telling me her fairy tale—all the way I carried her in my arms home to Old Court—all the way back, till I met my father, as has already been related.

It was an awful trial to give up thus, of my own free will, the hopes and the expectations of my life—to be brought down from the pursuit of fabulous wealth—of unheard-of fame—to the prosaism of an existence I knew so well.

Had my father urged me to adopt any course—had he pictured to me the relief I could afford—the money my remaining at home would save—it might not have seemed so hard to decide; but he left it for me—uninfluenced, remember, by any sentimental exaggerations—by any special pleading—to do what I thought best and right.

And thinking it best and right to put self

on one side—to consider the many instead of the one, I decided—and when I told him my decision, and heard him say, “God bless you, Tom!” a conviction stole over me that there might be something more blessed in life than having one’s own way—namely, the consciousness of having striven to do one’s best for those who were nearer and dearer than self.

“God bless you, Tom!” I think it no shame to say that my eyes filled when my father laid his hand on my shoulder and spoke those words, and that as we walked home through the twilight together, talking like friends, it seemed a finer and a manlier thing to face the realities of life, and conquer them, than to build air castles, which never an one might inhabit, even mentally, save myself.

CHAPTER V.

ALL ABOUT ROSE.

So it came about that I remained at home, and helped my father. All the day long I was about the farm, or down at the mills—the upper mill, where the wheel was undershot, and where that rascal Bill, the herd boy, instead of keeping his charges from straying, fished in the pond, with a bent pin and a bit of string, whenever he thought my back was turned—and the lower mill, which, though more newly built, was more picturesque, since the water fell over the wheel, making a pleasant music all the day long.

Thus passed nearly four years, and during that time scarcely a day went by without my seeing Rose Surry. Sir Humphrey had always been friendly with my father, and in the habit of stopping at the mill, to chat over politics, or of accepting an invitation to enter our house—covered with creepers and roses—in order to say good-morning to my mother, and taste the last October brewing; and although Lady Surry held herself aloof, as was natural, from such plebeians as ourselves, still a little incident, which occurred after I had been at home a year, compelled civility even from that stately dame, who, if only the daughter of a village apothecary, yet gave herself all those haughty airs which stamp the line of “Vere de Vere.”

“Set a beggar on horseback, and he will ride to the devil,” states an old adage; but Lady Surry, once mounted, did nothing of the kind. She simply galloped across the frontier line of a different class, and took up her position with them—a rare, haughty

madam, who looked down upon the “lower orders” as inferior beings, and made herself offensive to a degree no one who has not come in contact with a woman of her type can imagine.

But, spite of her pride and conceit, there were things Lady Surry could not do. For example, she could not drive—she was not to the manner born; and though she would turn out in a low phaeton, sometimes drawn by a pair, sometimes by only one pony, every one saw that she had not the remotest idea how to manage a horse, and that if she failed some day to come to grief, it would only be through the special intervention of Providence, or, as not a few hinted, of that other power who is popularly, and, I must say, I think not erroneously, supposed to take care of his own.

The service I was enabled to do Lady Surry arose out of her utter ignorance of equine nature, and was rendered in this wise.

One day, as I was walking into Crommingford, I beheld, at some distance from me, a phaeton in imminent danger of being backed into the ditch, for the horse which was harnessed to it had drawn right across the road, plunging furiously, whilst the driver—a lady—strove to mend matters by flogging him unmercifully.

The creature did not know what she wanted, and she did not know what she wanted herself; whereupon, seeing that the result could only prove a smash, and a bad one, I ran on to the scene of action as rapidly as possible, and arrived just in time to seize the reins, and prevent the frightened animal from over-turning both itself and the vehicle.

Of course when I ran forward I did not know who the fair one in distress might be, nor for a moment afterwards, indeed—not until she spoke—was I aware that I had saved Lady Surry from what might have proved a serious accident, neither did she recognize me.

“I cannot think,” she began, in a tone wherein anger and fear were about equally mingled, “what is the matter with the horse. He never did so before.”

“Perhaps he never had the same reason,” I said while stroking the frightened creature, and trying to pacify him. “He has got the shaft inside the saddle; you must have been urging him on and then suddenly checking him. Here, my lad,” I added, addressing the small boy in buttons—her only attendant—who stood on the other side of the horse, apparently terrified to death. “When I back him you pull out the shaft—do you see?” but the boy either could not see or else would not do it, so I had to beg Lady Surry to alight, while we unbuckled the strap and extricated the shaft, which must have annoyed the horse inconceivably.

“Oh! it is you, Mr. Luttrell, is it?” she said, as I assisted her to the ground. “I am infinitely obliged for your kindness,” whereupon I said it was nothing, all the time

being well aware that madam's fingers were itching to give me half-a-crown, and that she was bemoaning her fate, which had sent me instead of a labourer to her assistance.

After that I took the horse out, and walked him up and down for a few minutes—soothing him as best I could—then, when he seemed tolerably quiet, I harnessed him, spite of a few kicks and plunges. I was in my native element with the animal. I had been with horses all my life, and I felt almost superior for once to Lady Surry, whom I asked if she would allow me to drive her home.

“He is hardly safe for a lady's hand yet,” I suggested; and, although with a bad grace, she thanked me for my offer, and accepted it.

As we drove up the avenue I saw Sir Humphrey before us in the distance, and when we overtook him I pulled up, and jumping out, proposed to relinquish the reins.

“No,” he said, when Lady Surry had told him the story in a garbled form, and without giving me credit I thought I deserved, “as you have managed so admirably, you had better complete your adventure by delivering my wife safely at home; you know, Matilda,” he added, “what I always tell you, there is danger in your going out with only that boy, for you cannot drive—you never could—those phaetons are never safe vehicles at the best of times, and had the horse not been quiet as a sheep, it is hard to say where you might have been before Mr. Luttrell reached you.”

Which was altogether a nice re-assuring speech for a man to utter to a woman of Lady Surry’s peculiar mental organization, and I saw a flush rise nearly to her temples as she listened.

She bore the thrust well, however, merely answering with a little laugh, “I think, however, I can manage him now so far as

the house myself, and I will drive on so as to meet Mr. Luttrell at luncheon."

Thus assuming that I intended lunching with her.

"As the phaeton disappeared I turned to Sir Humphrey, and begged he would excuse me if I said good-bye.

"Indeed, I shall not excuse you at all," answered the Baronet, whose manner was hearty, and who meant what his manner implied. "My wife told me to bring you in, and I mean to do so."

But when I told him straightforwardly that I would rather not go to Old Court, that at home we dined early, and that if I were not in they would be waiting for me, Sir Humphrey seemed to understand exactly how I felt about the affair, and pressed his hospitality no further, although he walked with me so far as the gate near the bridge already mentioned, aye, and even strolled a few yards further up the lane.

Perhaps it may have been this backward-

ness on our part—this determination not to thrust ourselves upon people who were wealthier and grander than we—that made Lady Surry more tolerant of Rose's visits to our house, or perhaps she did not know of their frequency.

Personally, I have always suspected that the good looks and flattering tongue of a young fellow employed in the lower mill, had much to do with the fact that Rose's nurse affected with her charge this particular spot of earth.

“It was so nice sitting by the water,” one day she told me; but then, as there was water in Sir Humphrey's grounds, this assertion did not exactly “wash,” for which reason, perhaps, she thought it well to add—

“And it is so pleasant to hear the mill-wheel going.” A remark that, having a touch of poetry about it, looked to me still more suspicious.

Those were the days in which Rose and I became such fast comrades—in which we

looked for the earliest primroses, and welcomed wild hyacinths, violets, and wood-anemones, like friends. Those were the days when we looked for the blue bonnets' eggs, and watched with the intensest anxiety for the moment when half-a-dozen young thrushes should, at sight of us, open their bills for food—those were the days when my darling made herself swords, and parasols, and butterfly cages, out of rushes—when we were all very innocent and very happy, and when I had experienced just enough of the world's disappointments and the world's anxiety to be aware of the value of a happiness which the troubles and cares of after life often prevent a man enjoying.

The sacrifice—I use the word for want of a better, for none occurs at the moment, which will exactly express my meaning—the sacrifice of my own inclinations I had made, and the footing on which my father put me when I made it, enabled me to take part in the family councils, and as my father

and I drew nearer and nearer together, I ventured to suggest many reforms in our *ménage*, and to institute domestic changes that seemed to me greatly needed.

Studying hard myself, and doing what I could to instruct Joan, whose education was grievously backward, seeing no chance of the younger fry being sent to school, and noticing that years, the most important of their lives, were passing away while they were learning nothing during their passage, I talked to my father concerning the expediency of procuring a governess capable of teaching the elder children, and initiating Joan into those feminine mysteries and accomplishments wherein, owing to the fact that my mother's time was always occupied with the younger children, she bade fair to be so ignorant.

It was a good day for Joan when Miss Snowdon came amongst us, and the governess proved a comfort to my mother too, although at first, of course, she did not like the idea

of having a stranger domesticated at our hearth.

Naturally, Joan sulked and rebelled a little at the commencement of the new dynasty, but after a long talk and walk she and I had one day together, she agreed she was growing old enough to be a "young lady," and to try to help in keeping things straight. Dear Joan, she made none the worse mother to our young ones, none the less careful an instructress when the time arrived for her to do her part, because she had once climbed trees, and stolen cherries, and perilled her neck, and torn her clothes.

In my short-sightedness I was wont to endure agonies of humiliation at the ways of my "boy sister," as I used to call her; but there was not one amongst us nine who turned out so true, and brave, and tender, and self-sacrificing, as Joan, and I have often thought since, that in the woods and by the river she must have conned those lessons which have since stood her in such good

stead many and many a time. If she did not learn what she knew from nature, where else could she have been so instructed ? A grand girl you developed into, my sister, when the need came for you to exert yourself ; and prosperity has not changed your nature, for you are the largest-souled woman I ever met—not one, even my love, excepted.

After Miss Snowdon had been with us for a time, one day, to our intense astonishment, Lady Surry called, not, as might be imagined, to request that all acquaintance between her daughter and Joan should cease, but to ask, as a great favour, if Rose might be permitted to join Miss Snowdon's classes. She had heard from Sir Humphrey, she added, "what a most superior person Mrs. Luttrell's governess appeared, and as Rose was too delicate and young to be sent to school, she felt most anxious for her to learn with other children, when emulation might induce application."

All of which being translated, meant that Lady Surry was beginning to feel ashamed

of Rose, who really, so far as book-learning went, could not be considered any better than a little dunce, and that she most earnestly desired to avoid the expense and trouble of engaging a governess on her own account.

Clearly she had survived all her former fears of our encroaching on her condescension, for she was most gracious in her manner towards my mother, and actually went so far as to say she hoped she would come some day and see the gardens at Old Court.

Considering the gardens at Old Court were not worth seeing, and that my mother never went outside our gates excepting to church, Lady Surry's somewhat careful approaches to neighbourliness were duly appreciated by us all.

But it was settled that Rose should come and learn with our children, and accordingly each day in the summer my fairy used, attended by her nurse, or Hoskins, to come over dressed all in white, while in the winter

she appeared a mass of bright colours wrapped up in furs. The darling face, looking out from its scarlet hood trimmed with white swansdown, seems to be peeping at me now. Oh, Rose, I loved you then, although I did not know it—although not a feminine face, excepting those of my mother and sisters, had ever glanced out of the windows of my air castles, I loved you, sweetest—loved you when I used to run out and lift you from the phaeton, and carry you away to the school-room, where I set you down beside a blazing fire.

Every one was fond of the child—she was everybody's pet—she was in nobody's way. She was not clever, but she could learn all it seemed likely she would ever need to know, and I helped her, and so did Joan, and she worshipped Joan, believing my sister to be the best, the dearest, the darlingest creature that ever lived.

Since his marriage, I do not believe Sir Humphrey had ever felt so happy as when

it was arranged that his pet was to come and learn with our children. - Sometimes he would take our house on his way home, and then it was wonderful to see the little eager face, and to hear the glad cry of "papa, papa," and to behold how, unmindful of all discipline, she would fling down her book and rush out to greet him, and be caught up in his great strong arms. They would go away hand-in-hand together like a pair of children, Rose turning at intervals to nod to Joan, who always watched the little figure disappearing till it became a mere speck in the distance.

Once, too, when Lady Surry was invited to some grand house where it was impossible she could go without a maid, she wrote and asked my mother to take charge of Rose during her absence ; and although we all felt Lady Surry was doing us the honour of making use of our poor house and its belongings, still we were too glad at the prospect of Rose's visit to feel resentful or other than

delighted, to have the fairy princess all to ourselves for a whole fortnight.

It was during the course of that fortnight Dick Tullett, an old schoolfellow of mine, who had turned artist, and was down sketching in our neighbourhood, took a portrait of Rose, sitting in our porch, with her lap full of flowers, and her face turned half towards us, while her eyes were inclined to look shyly down. Dick had never until then thought of becoming a portrait or figure painter, but he succeeded so well in reproducing Rose on paper, that Sir Humphrey bought the crayon sketch from him, and Dick, with that adaptability which is one of the proofs of genius, at once abandoned trees, and turned his attention to men, or rather to women.

He is Dick Tullett no more to me or to anybody else ; he is Richard Tullett, Esquire, R.A., who lives in a great house at the West End, and has painted half the female members of the nobility, and is noted for his dexterous

treatment of satin and pearls. He exhibits every year of course several portraits which are so many advertisements and testimonials in his favour; he has become in his way—a bad way in my opinion—a tremendous swell, and is good enough to invite us to his “At Homes,” which are held on Saturday evenings, with an appendix on Sundays for the benefit of a select few; but I do not like Dick now any more than I like his pictures.

He could no more paint a child at this minute like the child he drew when scarcely out of his teens, than he could fly. They are all little ladies—all misses—all lacking that sweet simplicity wherewith he surrounded my darling seated amid the flowers.

From his youth upward Dick always kept one eye fixed steadily upon the main chance, even though at the same time he might be looking with the other at his art; therefore it did not surprise me that he should accept

Sir Humphrey's offer for a portrait he had really executed for and given to me. Neither will it astonish any one who may have the pleasure of Mr. Tullett's acquaintance at the present day, to know he never offered to draw me another.

In after days Sir Humphrey kindly lent the original to Joan, who copied it for me in her amateur fashion, and from that copy was executed by one of the most lovely portrait-painters I ever knew the miniature which suggested the title of this story, and which is lying before me as I write.

We were happy then in that glorious summer weather, happy as health and youth and inexperience ought ever to be. There was sunshine above, there were flowers all round and about our paths. We seemed to be living in a great house containing many rooms, the treasures of which could never change nor become exhausted ; but our house, our beautiful habitation, was built upon the

sand, and when, after the tempest which beat upon it, the rain had subsided, and the winds were still, behold we looked, and there remained not of all that grand pile one stone left upon another.

CHAPTER VI.

LOVE-MAKING.

AFTER I had been "doing my duty," as people put it, for the space of three years or thereabouts, and when things were getting a little straighter pecuniarily, when spite of the bill of sale we had weathered some very ugly storms, and were beginning to consider ourselves in tolerably smooth waters, there came overtures of conciliation from Mrs. Graham, who wrote to say that having incidentally heard her nephew had relinquished his plan of letting me study for the bar, she could not refrain from expressing her regret at the fact. She had hoped, she said, before

she died, to see one of the family in the way of making himself famous, and it was consequently a real grief to her (this Mrs. Graham underlined) to learn that her nephew meant to waste the brains she understood I possessed on "guano and bran."

Why Mrs. Graham pitched on those two words as representative terms for agriculture and milling, to this day I cannot comprehend; I only know she employed them, and that my father pondered over her sentence more perhaps than he might have done had it been differently worded.

Had Mrs. Graham's letter, however, contained no further remarks, it is needless to say the grief it expressed would have been disregarded; but the lady, warming with her subject, proceeded to greater lengths. She offered, in the event of my father permitting me to pursue the course originally intended, to let bygones be bygones, to pay all my reasonable expenses through college, and to allow me one hundred and fifty

pounds a year till I had made the way at the bar she confidently anticipated for me. Should I care to gratify an old woman's whim, she went on, it would please her if I could come to town and arrange preliminaries. She wanted no thanks, it was purely to please herself she made the proposal, and she trusted in THIS case no feeling of jealousy on the part of my parents would frustrate her wishes.

Jealousy ! I should like to have seen the person who could have made my parents jealous concerning the affection of their children !

Had my father given me this letter to read over quietly, when I was alone, I think nothing might ever have come of it—that my sense would have told me I was doing my duty where I was, and that, all things considered, I had no right to place my inclinations first, the help I owed my father second.

But he read the letter to me, and the

thing coming suddenly—at a time, too, when I was perhaps a trifle weary of the monotony of my work, when the old discontent was leavening all my nature—I could not for the moment help a look of utter thankfulness resting on my face—an exclamation of rejoicing escaping my lips.

“That settles the question, Tom,” said my father—and though, sobered in a moment, I begged time for consideration, for decision, he adhered to his text.

“I know where your heart is now,” he replied to all my entreaties—“I know, and I will not baulk you again. Besides, things are much better now, Tom—and if—if anything happened to me, you are old enough, and business man enough, to see to them. And Joan is growing up, also—dear Joan!”

Dear Joan!—ay, truly the blessed angel of our house—who came to me when she heard the news, and bade me go forth, never doubting.

“I will try to take your place, so far as I can, Tom. I can see to most things, and help papa greatly ; and he has set his heart, like Mrs. Graham and me, on your doing credit to us all—so go, Tom—go. It will be best for every one of us.”

“If you were not here, Joan, I should not go a step,” I said.

“Then for me—go,” she answered, and I agreed.

But Joan—dear Joan—could you but have seen to the end, would you have been so urgent, I wonder ? Has all the success paid quite for the disappointment ?

“But you might have had the disappointment without the success,” Joan would suggest, were she here at this moment ; and I subscribe to this, believing honestly that all we have to do with our lives is to bear the burden of them, and to try and make ourselves content with whatever lot God is pleased to give us.

And so it was all settled that Mrs.

Graham's offer should be accepted, and I go up to London to see the old lady—and life. At the risk of being considered either untruthful or methodistical, I found both about equally dull. London, I take it, to a youth who has been decently brought up, and who has no friends in the great metropolis, is as stupid a place as the Essex marshes. I had no one to take me to see those sights which are really interesting—I had no one to talk to—no one to tell me the places of amusement at which a few hours might be spent pleasantly.

There is no town where a lad cannot find plenty of people to indoctrinate him into its vices and its follies; but these casual acquaintances had no charms for me. I was not exactly like a boy let loose from his mother's apron strings, and when, in sheer disgust and *ennui*, I turned back to the poor lonely woman in Queen Anne Street, who was going to do so much for me, that I felt my leisure hours were due to her, she re-

received me with such gratitude, as convinces me now her married life could not have been an existence drenched through and through with rose water.

Of my college experiences I do not intend to give you any record ; I worked hard, and ultimately proved successful. I had my troubles, but I extricated myself from them. I got into debt—more shame for me—but managed to satisfy the people who had trusted to my honour—shall I say ? without troubling my father I had my flirtations—one a trifle too serious, so far as the girl was concerned, to recall now without regret ; but all these things have affected my life but little. What did influence it, was that evening in the early spring time, when I stood with Rose Surry under the apple trees, whispering my love.

I have already repeated what she said to me afterwards, and the reader may conclude from that what words were foregone. Truth was, we had always loved each other, and

whenever we came to years of discretion—nay, rather to the years when folly seems wisdom—we could refrain from speech no longer. It was so sweet to stand there in the moonlight, with my arm round her waist, unmindful of father or mother—of social differences—of ways and means—of marriage—of houses—servants, equipages, friends, society—of aught save love.

Had I the gift of that successful Academician, Richard Tullett, Esq., I should like to present you with a sketch from memory of my darling, as she stood in the moonlight, with her dear head a little drooping, listening to the old, old story, that was then all new to her—new to her—yes, new to both of us. I am grateful to remember it was so, Rose—that I never really loved a woman before—that I have never, in the true acceptation of the word, loved a woman since. Oh ! sweet, pure face, did the moon's light ever fall on anything more beautiful ! Oh ! slight, fragile figure, did poet ever dream of

aught more exquisite than your tender grace ! Oh ! dear, true heart—mine is breaking now to think of all it had to endure. Though grey hairs are plentifully mingling with the black—though my cheeks are furrowed, and Time's chisel has been busy tracing lines across my forehead—though I am growing old, and feel often that the end is nearer than the beginning, still, recalling this night all our story, memory leaps back over the years, and the bliss and the anguish are both as keen now as they seemed in the days when we both were young—when we loved, when we hoped, when we lost.

I was twenty-five years of age that very day, and my darling a little over sixteen ; but she was in many ways younger than her age then—just as she had been younger than her age when first I knew her.

To her parents she seemed only a child still, while to mine she was no older than Patty, who had only been promoted to long dresses and turned-up hair a few months

previously. Joan was the only one who suspected our affection one for the other, or who guessed, when she came to call us in to supper, why we had lingered in the orchard so long.

I suppose, had Rose been a model young lady, she would, instead of letting me know that I was more to her than anybody in the world, have referred me to her father—as we are well aware that fathers usually know more of the secrets of their daughters' hearts than daughters themselves; but then Rose was not a model young lady, and chanced to be also an utter coward, dreading her mother's anger—never so happy as when she could keep every occurrence of her life from that matron's knowledge, and never so wretched as while dreading that “perhaps mamma might get to know—perhaps some one might tell her.”

For myself, I confess that although clearly I ought either to have asked Sir Humphrey's consent to my addressing his daughter at

all, or proceeded next morning to Old Court, there to unfold a tale, I did nothing of the kind, and were I to pass my life over again, I should still do nothing of the kind.

I never could understand, and I never shall, learned in the law as people imagine me to be, why the moment a man has whispered a love tale, he should be expected forthwith to ice his passion by requesting an interview with the beloved object's father—why he should, within twenty-four hours at latest, be required to chill his tender affections by entering, hat in hand, the library where paterfamilias receives him grimly—(I am speaking, of course, of those cases when a man has not ten thousand a year and a title, and is consequently utterly ineligible, excepting in the eyes of the “one only,”) and going through a statement of his affairs, which in the nature of things cannot, and does not, prove satisfactory, but always leaves the stern parent full of dark suspi-

cions concerning his income, his prospects, his connections, his habits, his expenses, and himself.

It has often occurred to me that it would save much trouble and anxiety both to the lover and the beloved object's friends, if after a certain amount of spooning had been gone through, and the sentiments of dearest Donnabella ascertained, the young aspirant for matrimonial honours were to write somewhat in this fashion to Donnabella's natural protector :—

“ SIR,

“ I beg to inform you that, having every reason to believe your beloved daughter regards me with sentiments warmer than those of mere esteem, I have placed a statement of my affairs in the hands of Messrs. Crisp and Sutton, Accountants, Throgmorton Street, who in the course of a few days will communicate with you on the subject, when I trust the result may prove satisfactory.

With reference to the respectability of my antecedents and present position, I beg to enclose testimonials which would, I flatter myself, convince the mind of even a Marlborough Street magistrate.

“Your obedient servant,

“DONNABELLA’S LOVER.”

The advantages of such a course of proceeding must be at once apparent. It would be pleasanter for the young man, for the young woman, and for the young woman’s friends, and it would further produce another most desirable effect, namely, enabling Donnabella’s lover, when he became her husband, to silence those remarks concerning Donnabella’s not “having known,” and Donnabell’s lover having deceived her before marriage, which occasionally, when the veneer of the walnut-wood furniture begins to crack, and the paint of the newly decorated villa to peel off, and the first brightness of the bran-new carpets to fade, are apt to be

made by even the most devoted of wives, and the best of women.

I, at all events, after sunning myself in Rose's smiles, never dreamt of venturing into the keen frost I knew I should have to encounter in the presence chamber at Old Court, and indeed, when I told Rose that I loved her—and she said she loved me—marriage seemed as far distant from us as death.

There was no need to think of or to plan for it. Years must pass, I knew, before it would be possible for me to take Rose away from her parents; but she was so young, this seemed a matter of little consequence, and I felt so sure of my own ultimate success, of my own ability eventually to surround her with every luxury she was likely to desire, that I felt it no dishonour to let her even in stealth engage herself to me. I knew no one could love Rose as I loved her, I knew no one could make her so happy, and finally I could not help tell-

ing her all that was in my heart. Many an evening during that visit home, the words, though trembling on my lips, remained unuttered. It was all such fairy land that I dreaded speaking, lest speech should destroy the illusion. True love always makes a man timid, and I remained silent when my heart was full, lest my dove, instead of nestling in my bosom, should be frightened away.

But somehow it all came about naturally that evening. I was leaving on the morrow, and Rose looked sad; I told her I should be back again for a long, long visit in the summer, and then she sighed and said she feared she should not be at Old Court. That very day Lady Surry had spoken of the necessity of their going abroad, as Sir Humphrey's health had lately been anything rather than satisfactory.

Then I asked her if she should be glad to go, and she said she should like to visit the continent, but—

“But what, Rose?”

“I have never been very much with mamma, and I shall be sorry to leave Old Court and Joan.”

“And no one else?” I asked. My heart seemed to stand still at my own temerity, but the plunge had been made and I must go on.

How I went on I cannot remember, and if I could I should not tell; all I can say is we stood there steeped in bliss, as the orchard lay steeped in moonlight, and the fairy tale of her childhood had come actually to pass, and in answer to my question she said, with that slight lisp which comes back to my ear now—the merest suspicion of a lisp—“It all happened in this garden, Tom, and the prince and princess are you and me.”

Oh! royal land of love, which may be trodden alike by peer and peasant, in which each man, whatever his estate, may feel a king! I wonder if any two who ever entered your domain were so happy as Rose

and I that night ! For us the curse seemed lifted from the earth, to us the supper-table, to which Joan summoned us, seemed spread with viands that tasted as food had never tasted before—we felt no sorrow, we experienced no dread—and when we left the dining-room, and passed into an apartment which was lighted only by the moon-beams, in order that Joan, as was her custom, might sing to my father before he retired for the night, I silently pressed Rose's hand, in order to emphasize the words of Joan's song, and in return the little fingers closed on mine with a clasp that seemed to say : “Never, Tom—never—for ever.”

There are some ballads which appear to mix themselves up with one's life. It does not matter how slight the words may be, or how simple the melody to which they are allied—they still link themselves with the recollection of events, still after long years float plaintively through the chambers of memory.

As I remember the moonlight and the

apple blossoms, the soft tender expression that passed over my darling's face, the pressure of her hand, the touch of her hair when it swept my cheek as I drew her towards me, so likewise I remember the ballad Joan sung that night, with a certain intention and meaning, I thought, but perhaps I might be mistaken ; yet if not, the words, were strangely applicable to our position. Here they are :—

“ I never can forget thee,
Whate'er my lot may be ;
In sadness or in joy, my heart
Will ever turn to thee :
The fond remembrance of the past
May sometimes bring regret,
But till my life shall cease to be,
I never can forget.

I never can forget thee,
My destiny is cast,
For as thou wert my first love,
So thou wilt be my last ;

You say I soon shall cease to think
That we have ever met,
But oh ! you little know my heart,
To say I can forget.”*

Joan sang other songs that night, but of them my memory holds no record. Love never does, save of the things which concerns itself; save for the beloved object it is essentially selfish. I fear Rose and I were essentially selfish, as seated close beside one another we listened to the music. *Knowing what we knew*, it was sufficient to be near, breathing the same air, hearing the same music—ah ! me.

Suddenly it seemed so to my imagination, but in reality I suppose after a long succession of sweet sounds, Joan rose from the piano.

“ Do you know how late it is ? ” she asked, putting her hands on my shoulder ; and I

* The words of the above, which are written by Miss E. Hersee, have been wedded to a simple and touching melody by Mrs. John Holman Andrews.

started to remember Rose had only stayed with us to supper, after much persuasion, and on the positive assurance that I would see her home early, before Sir Humphrey and Lady Surry returned from a dinner party whither they were gone.

“I will put on my bonnet at once,” Rose said, guiltily, and then with the charming readiness and equivocation natural to her sex, she added: “I forgot everything, dear Joan, while listening to your singing.”

Did you, love? I think not quite.

When she hurried from the room to invest herself in the warm wraps which Milly insisted she should wear, Joan, coming quite close up to me, observed: “I shall walk home with you, Tom.”

“No, no, Joan,” I answered pettishly, “you had much better not venture out in the night air.”

But Joan, drawing me aside to one of the windows, stuck to her resolution. “Last evening I should not have offered the infi-

tion of my company, but to-night I insist," she said. "Last evening no matter what any person had remarked, you might have defied him, but now the case is different. I shall be dreadfully *de trop*, of course, but I mean to make one of the party, nevertheless."

Which she did, keeping close beside us on the open road, where we might possibly meet some passer-by, and lingering behind as we entered the avenue, when my hand stole to Rose's and Rose's little palm pressed against mine in token of dear remembrance of the words we heard that evening mutually uttered.

Joan, if you were not so high above me, mentally as well as socially, I should like to ask, as a mere matter of curiosity, where you learnt all the lore you used to such advantage on the occasion in question.

Not out of any book, so much I can swear, since no book of that sort has ever been written; not by experience, for girls, unless

they lead the lives of utter Bohemians, must, for reasons too numerous to mention, remain experimentally ignorant of these matters, until a lover appears for whom they care. Now, though there were one or two individuals who "came after" Joan, to use an expression current in our part of the world, there was nobody Joan wanted to come after her. My hoyden sister held her head rather high for her position, suitors said, thus reconciling themselves to the rebuffs they received; but though Joan has since married above her then station, I know she was not waiting to carry her wares to a better market.

Only like many girls she had her ideal of a husband, and none of the young men who sought her love fulfilled that ideal, wherefore Joan was still heart-whole, and yet she knew by intuition all Rose and I had to say to each other.

I should like to be a woman for a time, in order to be able to understand the reason

of this wonderful instinct which they possess.

Truly as the author of 'School' remarks : "Bless them, they know everything, and what they do not nature teaches them."

But how does nature do it ? I wish Mr. Robertson had added that piece of information.

When we drew near the house, Joan came to Rose's side, but she did not talk, or seem to hear my whisper to Rose as we stood before the hall door : "Are you happy, love?"

She lifted her dear eyes to mine, and as the moonlight fell full upon her face, I could read there no shadow of disquietude, no trace of doubt or regret.

"You know I am," she murmured shyly ; and then Hoskins, grown grey and stooping, appeared, and Joan and I bade her good-night, and walked back together, talking as we went about it all, and the best course for us to pursue.

And we both agreed for reasons which the sagacious reader may easily imagine, that the best thing for the three of us to do under the circumstances was to say nothing whatever—for some time, at least—about the fact that I loved Rose, and that Rose loved me.

When in my childhood I was inducted into the mysteries of English Grammar, and learnt in Lindley Murray the famous sentence anent Penelope, I never imagined that a similar form of speech could come to mean so much to me.

“ You will have to be very careful, though,” Joan remarked; “ you must not let any one suspect your feelings till you have spoken to Sir Humphrey. That was the reason I wished to chaperone you to-night. Tom, confess that for a moment you actually hated me ? ”

But I would not confess, and declared that her society had added greatly to the pleasure of our walk. Nevertheless Joan held to her opinion.

CHAPTER VII.

I SEE SIR HUMPHREY.

It is a great pity that when a young man tells a young woman he loves her, it is thereby implied and understood—always supposing the young man means, as the lower ten millions say, to “act honourable”—he is to marry her with all convenient speed. It would be so nice if the matter could go on for a little time—even, shall we say, for a fortnight—without the fact of the adored one possessing a body which will need to be supplied with necessary food, and provided with sufficient raiment, being forced upon his attention. This is a point on which women

have such an advantage over us. “How much will it cost?” need never occur to their minds—unless, indeed, with reference to their trousseau, and then somebody else pays for it.

It shakes down a quantity of the apple blossom at once, having to consider that accursed pecuniary question. Man being a reasoning animal, and therefore unhappy, has to consider, while seeking his mate amongst the flowers of early spring, whether he shall be able to provide haws and berries enough for her sustenance in the winter weather. I am not aware that such considering does much good, or that looking forward, as it is called, really betters one’s position ; but the whole thing has come to be such a recognised necessity of British society, that one might as well turn atheist at once, or unbeliever in the happiness of being possessed of fifty thousand a-year, as strive to evade it.

Even mentally I did not, and I cannot

say that the study of ways and means increased my happiness. The very next morning after I had declared my love, I awoke with a new sense of bliss, and a new sense of misery, on me. I loved—I was beloved; but, alas! it was needful for me from that hour to consider how soon I could provide a nest for my darling—a home I could ask her to share.

This was the weariness. So far as Rose and I were concerned, we could have gone on love-making patiently for an indefinite period; but then, in the present admirable state of society, which requires that before a man begins to make love, he shall ask the beloved object to fix the marriage day, this was impossible. Had we only been the persons whose inclinations needed to have been consulted, we could rapturously have taken lodgings, and billed and cooed on a second floor, a respectable wedded couple; or we could have corresponded, writing love-letters by the five hundred, and wandered

about the lanes of Crommingford when I found leisure to return thither, till luck changed and I could feel safe in asking my love to share the discomforts of a newly built semi-detached villa, to which paradi-
siacal abode we might invite our friends, if we had any—wishing them at Jericho all the time.

But either plan, and both plans, Mrs. Grundy negatived.

“ You shall neither,” so that worthy lady said to me, whilst I was shaving next morning, and, in the process, cutting my chin—
“ You shall neither marry Rose on your terms, nor court her as you wish. If the thing is to be at all, you must first face your position, and then Sir Humphrey; after which you may perchance have a few blissful moments—more possibly not.”

Whereupon I anathematized both Mrs. Grundy and my razor, and resolved to let things remain.

I am happy to think things remained, for

what do you imagined occurred? Lady Surry, who would persist in considering Rose a child, asked my mother to take charge of her during her and Sir Humphrey's absence on the Continent, adding that, as of course Miss Surry's visit would entail extra expense, she and Sir Humphrey should wish, being aware of our circumstances, to render that expense as light as possible.

To which my dear mother—Heaven bless her! — replied never thinking of consequences, that as one child was away, and dear Rose would but fill the place of their absent son, she and my father could not think of looking upon, or receiving her, save as a visitor—one of the family.

Whereupon Lady Surry wrote a very polite letter of acknowledgment, accepted the kindness as cordially as it was offered (?), and sent Rose.

Dear Rose, those were days spent in paradise to us. We were together from morning

till night, we visited all the well-remembered haunts, we stood together where I rescued the bag, and we sat on the bank of the river as we had sat that day when Lady Surry appeared to spoil our enjoyment. Sometimes Joan was with us, sometimes we wandered about the fields and through the woods alone together. It was heaven that time. I hope I am not profane when I say I cannot imagine or understand any heaven where Rose and I shall not be permitted to wander, hand in hand, through the Elysian fields.

“Purified,” suggests an evangelical relative. My dear saint, love purifies. Rose and I were pure in those days, in thought and word, as God’s holy angels.

“Married,” suggests a cynic. “And mated,” I answer, which disarms his satire.

There is some truth, I do believe, in the old Scottish idea that he who laughs uproariously over night is “fey.”

In Mr. Grant’s novel, the ‘Romance of War,’ which I have not read for a

quarter of a century or less, there is an account of a certain Cameron of Fassifern, who, enjoying himself more than his wont as it might be to-night, died not ingloriously on the following day. And sometimes, when Rose and I were standing in the full sunlight of love, there would steal through my mind a memory of that olden superstition.

It was too much, we were too happy ; the bliss was too great for earth, the cup too full to be carried steadily to our lips. And yet, my darling, if you could speak to me now, I think, spite of all that followed, you would accept the subsequent grief rather than have the sunshine and the love of those summer days blotted out from memory. I know I would ; and much as you suffered, sweetest, I rather fancy that, being a man, my share of the misery was worse than yours—at least I hope so now, as I hoped so then.

Parents are slow to recognize the pos-

sibility of their sons and daughters falling in love, and mine proved no exception to the general rule. Further, they were a little thrown off the track on which my affections were at that time travelling express, by various allusions which Mrs. Graham had considered it necessary to make in her letters to Crommingford, concerning a certain Miss Sherlock, whom I certainly thought a handsome girl, and whose father, a solicitor in good practice, seemed inclined to give me that countenance and assistance of which sucking barristers stand so much in need.

I am not aware that any false delicacy should prevent my stating Miss Sherlock then loved me, but the love was all on her side. Caring for Rose, I could not have loved another; but it pleased Mrs. Graham, spite of all my disclaimers, to insist I was smitten in that quarter, and she was never weary of telling me what a desirable match it would prove.

Not that I think in her heart she much

liked Miss Sherlock ; but the old lady had a keen appreciation of the value of loaves and fishes, as was natural, seeing she had never possessed anything else of value in her life ; and Mr. Sherlock, as has been said, was powerful and willing, and the moderate amount of success I had as yet attained was owing entirely to him.

I knew in those days that Miss Sherlock was well inclined enough for a flirtation with me, but I did not know she had lost her heart. If I had, Mr. Sherlock's briefs might have gone to some other struggling individual ; but as matters stood, I thought it no sin to be civil to the daughter, and to accept the father's invitations.

He was playing his little game, though of course it is only afterwards one can see the moves on the chessboard of life, and his game was to push me on and let me marry his daughter.

He did me the honour to think I had

brains, and as he put it, “the stuff in me,” and people have since been good enough to say that Mr. Sherlock’s penetration was correct.

Certainly few people in London at that time shared the lawyer’s opinion, so I felt grateful to him accordingly.

Having their heads full of Miss Sherlock, therefore, my parents never gave a thought to the well-known fact, that “propinquity is dangerous,” and that my propinquity to Rose was very close indeed, until one day when my father came upon us seated on the river-bank, a little above the upper mill and pond. It was an utterly secluded spot, with alder trees shading the stream, and a rather steep piece of ground covered with filbert trees and brambles, rising on the other side of the stream. No one ever passed that way, and when after picking our way up the bed of the river, we came to a smooth bit of turf, the only piece of the bank which was clear of trees and underwood, and sat

down there with the branches closing almost above us, and the ivy that grew over the old thorn bushes, making trailing wreaths, through which wild convolvulus entwined themselves, we felt almost as though we had found some desolate island where never a creature dwelt but ourselves. We were wont to sit there sometimes in utter silence, listening to the rippling of the stream, to the humming of the bees, to the songs of the birds, wrapped in a happiness too deep for words. But on that especial day I was talking to Rose about my hopes and plans, while all the while I held her dear hand clasped in mine, unconscious that at the time my father, whom some unhappy chance had led into our wilderness, crossing the stream where it took a sudden bend, was looking disapprovingly on our proceedings.

He never came near us, however, but walked home much exercised in spirit, and disappointed, so he afterwards told me, in his son, while Rose and I unsuspecting

wandered home soon afterwards across the fields—happy—oh ! friends, how happy I could never find words to tell.

After tea my father asked me if I would come with him to the mill, and though I should rather have remained at home near Rose, I at once consented. We passed half-way down the avenue and then turned off through a field path, where not a soul was in sight. When we entered this my father said suddenly—

“ What is all this between you and Miss Surry, Tom ? ”

The question took me aback for a moment, but then I answered—

“ The old story, sir, we love each other, and some day hope to be man and wife.”

“ And how long has this been going on ? ”

“ Since I was down in the spring.”

“ Have you spoken to Sir Humphrey ? ”

“ Certainly not.”

“ Then I am ashamed of you,” said my father, hotly. “ I did not think any son of

mine could have acted so dishonourably as to take a mean advantage of a girl's ignorance, and allow her to engage herself to him without the knowledge of her parents. You must leave here to-morrow, and I shall write to Sir Humphrey at once."

"Excuse me," I answered; "but if Sir Humphrey must be written to, I shall write to him myself. Of course I am well aware, that situated as I am at present, communicating with Rose's parents will put an end to the matter at once, so far as seeing her is concerned; but since you put the matter in that way, I will take the risk."

"I am disappointed in you," my father proceeded, "you should never have spoken a word of love to the girl till you were sure of her father's consent; and now when all the harm is done you will not even confess you were wrong."

"I do not think I was wrong," I answered. "I cannot think in our rank it is necessary for marriages to be contracted like

royal alliances ; I have loved Rose all my life—I shall never love, and I shall never marry another—and I mean to marry her if fifty Sir Humphreys refused their consent."

"Your love-making shall not go on under my roof at any rate," he replied ; "and till you have obtained Sir Humphrey's permission to address his daughter you shall never meet, if I can prevent your doing so. You seem to forget the disparity in your positions—the objection Sir Humphrey may naturally make, not only to your want of means, but to the difference in rank, which unquestionably exists between you and Miss Surry."

"In a worldly point of view," I replied, "it strikes me that a rising barrister is pecuniarily not a bad match for the daughter of an almost pauper baronet, for Rose will certainly not have one sixpence of fortune ; and with regard to the social differences of which you speak, although county people might not yet leave their cards on my wife,

still I am not aware that perfect happiness is to be compassed even by an acquaintance with those who certainly only tolerate Lady Surry, and sneer at the poverty of her husband."

"We have had enough of this, Tom," said my father.

"For me quite enough," I replied, and, for the first time in our lives, my father and I parted in anger.

As for my mother, her regrets, to my intense amazement, took quite another form. She was sorry she had asked Rose so much to the house—not because she feared what Sir Humphrey might think of the matter, but because she considered my darling a most unsuitable wife for any save a wealthy man.

"She was delicate, she was penniless, she was not the girl to advance a husband's prospects, she knew nothing of household affairs (this from my mother, who had never tried to know anything of them), she

was very lovable, and very amiable, of course, but my mother had hoped I should make a different choice. That Miss Sherlock, for instance, about whom Miss Graham wrote often——”

“Oh ! confound Miss Sherlock !” I exclaimed. “If there is to be peace between us, mother, never name that woman and Rose together in the same sentence again.”

“Tom,” broke in Joan at this juncture, “you had better not say anything more about the affair at present; mamma will think differently after a time, and so will you.”

“If you mean that I shall ever think differently about Rose, Joan,” I began defiantly, but she answered—

“No. I only mean that hereafter you will be able to understand how mamma and papa look at the matter, and they will understand how you feel.”

What a dear good girl she was. She came to me when I was packing my portmanteau, and threw fresh oil on the waters.

By all means she advised me to go and see Sir Humphrey, "And I should tell Mrs. Graham also," she added. "If she ever mean to do anything for you, that will make her say so; and she ought, for she has not a relation in the world besides ourselves."

"I am afraid she wants me to marry Miss Sherlock," I said.

"Then the sooner she knows you are not going to marry Miss Sherlock the better," Joan declared. "Tom, take the little sketch I copied from Dick Tullett's portrait, and show it to her. I wish you could take Rose herself."

"I think I will," I exclaimed. "If she were of age I would marry her to-morrow morning;" and then I went on packing viciously, for my holiday and my summer happiness were both over. Our island belonged to us no longer—our secret was shared by others—the world and the world's opinion had stepped inside our paradise, and that serpent of modern society, Mrs.

Grundy, had given us to eat of the apple of the knowledge of good and evil, and told us we must wander no more through Eden, till I could show a balance at my banker's, a house suitably furnished, an income of so much per annum, and a life insurance which I could undertake to keep up for the benefit of my wife and children.

Correct possibly, but unpleasant. I thought so then, I think so now.

My last matrimonial experiment was carried out on Mrs. Grundy's own plan in all particulars, and as the world, which likes to have a finger in every man's pie, is perfectly satisfied with its results, there can be no reason to doubt but that I was and am wrong, and Mrs. Grundy right.

Next day I left Crommingford, but before I went I had a long talk and walk with Rose.

To this of course my father objected, but Joan overruled his objection, for which I blessed her.

During that walk I told Rose everything. It is one of the characteristics of true love, I take it, that a man shall pour out his whole heart to the object of his adoration, let her be girl or woman—let her be capable of quite comprehending the position, or only able to grasp it through her sympathies.

My pet was little better than a child, yet she understood me.

“It is not papa I am afraid of, but mamma,” Rose said. “Oh ! Tom, make the best of it you can.”

The darling had always lacked moral courage, and this speech meant simply, “Show them your hopes for certainties.”

Oh, love ! oh, sweet ! if God had been only pleased to create you a little stronger, you would have been perfect. As it is, you carried with you the human taint, which merely made me love you more.

For you were weaker even than I, my treasure, and a man likes to feel the arms

that clasp his neck do not belong to quite an angel.

“Even if they refuse, will you love me, Rose?” I asked, and she answered, “Till death, Tom!” and, my darling, weak as He made you, the promise was kept.

So I went, but before I went my father and I were reconciled.

“If I have said anything disrespectful, sir,” I remarked, “I am sorry.”

“If I seemed harsh, Tom, it was only for your good,” he replied. “I wish you all speed in your wooing, for I know no girl in the whole world I would rather see your wife than Rose Surry.”

“Thank you, father,” I said humbly.

“All I desire on earth,” he went on, “is my children’s happiness, compassed honourably.”

“I hope you will never have cause to blush for one of us,” I answered; and then we shook hands, as is the manner of male creatures in England, and I departed.

Do you smile, reader, at all this? Ah! believe me it is a fine thing to have a gentleman for one's father; I do not mean with a hundred ancestors, or a hundred thousand pounds in money, but simply a gentleman, with a gentleman's simplicity, honour, and truth.

The fact did not do much for me, you will remark, ere this tale is finished, but you are wrong. It has stood me in good stead professionally, and the lessons of honour my father inculcated and taught us, not merely by precept, but example, helped us to fight the battle of life more bravely and more honestly than would otherwise have been the case.

Sir Humphrey and Lady Surry were expected to pass through London in the course of a few days; and Rose gave me the address of the baronet's sister, with whom they generally stayed when in town, so that there proved no necessity for me to take the journey I had at first contemplated,

namely to Paris, in order to face the parents, who would, I felt confident, try to separate me and Rose.

On my return to town, my first care was to present myself in Queen Anne Street, whence Mrs. Graham had departed, having left London the previous day for Tunbridge Wells. As I had nothing to keep me in London, I followed her thither, and was welcomed most enthusiastically. How did it happen that I had tired of Crommingford so soon? To see me at that time of the year was the last thing Mrs. Graham stated she anticipated. Perhaps, the old lady went on archly, I intended joining the Sherlocks, who were gone to the Isle of Wight, as of course I knew——

Of course, indeed, I knew, for Mr. Sherlock had invited me to spend some time with them at Ventnor, but I had not the slightest intention of accepting his hospitality, and so I informed Mrs. Graham.

“I am not much grieved to hear it,” she

replied, "I am not quite sure that I like Catharine Sherlock, or that I think she would make a good wife. She has her temper, or I am mistaken. Poor Puck (Puck was the poodle before honourably mentioned, a fat, lazy, pampered brute, that I cordially hated, and would have kicked had I dared) got his paw entangled in a lace flounce she wore one evening when she came to me, and tore it, and you should have seen how she looked. Of course you are not offended at my warning you."

"I assure you," I answered, "Miss Sherlock or her temper is nothing to me."

"Well, she wishes you were something to her," replied Mrs. Graham; "and at one time I certainly thought it might be a good match for you, but I hear they are living beyond their means, and that the girls will not have a sixpence."

"I am afraid that is a way nice girls have," I said.

"It is a very serious drawback, however,"

remarked Mrs. Graham ; “take my advice, Tom, and never marry without some money, at all events.”

“I should not like to marry without some money, certainly,” I answered, “since manna has ceased to fall from heaven ; but the fortune will certainly require to be on my side, since the only girl I care for in the world in that way has not, and never will have, a penny.”

“I am very sorry to hear it,” said my auditor, emphatically.

“I am not aware that there is any particular cause for sorrow,” I replied. “We can wait.”

“Then you are really engaged.”

“Really engaged. I mean in a few days to ask her father’s consent, which will of course be refused, but we must wait until he likes to give it.”

“And why should he refuse his consent ? What is there against you ?”

“I am not aware that there is anything

against me as an individual," I answered; "but the Surrys are much bigger people than ever the Luttrells were, even in their best days, and very probably Sir Humphrey may look higher for his daughter than a struggling barrister. I know I should were I in his shoes."

" You mean the people that live at Old Court. Upon my word, Master Tom——"

But there was no rebuke in her tone, nay, rather it sounded almost exultant, as she added—

" And pray how long has this been going on?"

" All my life, I fancy—at least, all my life since I first saw Rose—ever since she was a little thing like that," and I drew out Joan's copy of Mr. Tullett's portrait, and presented it to Mrs. Graham, who first put on her spectacles and then examined the face of my child love critically.

When she had looked it all over she returned me the sketch without a word.

After that pause she said, "I am afraid you have not been quite so thoughtful as you ought about Miss Sherlock. She certainly had reason to believe you cared for her."

"What reason?" I asked.

"Why you were always with them—with her—and you paid her attentions—and—and I am sure I thought you meant something serious."

"I am greatly vexed to hear you say so," I replied.

"Yes, it is unfortunate," remarked Mrs. Graham, "but now you had better leave me: I shall miss my afternoon nap if you stay gossiping here any longer—and I want to think over what you have told me quietly—you have done foolishly, Tom, but I am not angry."

Which was attributable, as Joan subsequently suggested, when she and I came to talk the matter over, to the fact of Rose being a baronet's daughter. The one desire of the old lady's life had been for years,

that a Luttrell should do well in the world.

“And it would help you enormously,” she said to me the next day, “to marry into such a family as that.”

“Oh! aunt,” I cried, for the pain of hearing Mrs. Grundy screaming in my ear was more than I could endure, “if Rose were the daughter of a labourer I should love her just the same, and I wish she were, for we could then marry at once.”

“Romance,” she answered, “all romance! Love is all very well, Tom, but believe me, success is better.”

In her heart did she think so I wonder, she who had nothing to love save parrot and poodle.

Whatever, however, her private opinions on that subject may have been, there could be no question of her approval of my choice. If there were times when qualms came over her, concerning Miss Sherlock’s disappointment, and the share she might have had in

causing it, these were but specks on the brightness of the rising grandeur and wealth she pictured as certainties for me.

“Tell Sir Humphrey Surry,” she said, “that I, Blanche Graham, born Luttrell, will, if he consent to your marrying his daughter, make you my heir. With that prospect and your profession, you may seem a desirable *parti* in the eyes of any man of Sir Humphrey’s means. There, I want no thanks. I should have done the same for Joan had your parents’ selfishness not refused her to me. Do not interrupt me, Tom, I always shall think and say it was selfish, when they had so many, that they could not spare me one.”

“But, aunt, Joan was as dear to them as any one of the others.

“I never said she was not,” retorted Mrs. Graham. “What I do say is, that they might have humoured my whim, after all I had done for your father, too—but still I am not sure that it has not turned out for the

best—I like you better now than I could ever have liked a girl; and if you marry this young creature and bring her home to me, I shall forgive your father."

Bring her home—there was a frightful notion—in fancy I beheld my darling mewed up in Queen Anne Street, with the bipeds and quadrupeds mentioned at an earlier point in this story, but I did not mean to lose every point in the game by evincing the horror wherewith Mrs. Graham's casual remark filled me, neither did I intend—supposing Rose agreed—and I knew she would, the darling—to disappoint or act in any way unfairly towards one who offered to do so much for us.

Although I had looked forward to having Rose all to myself in some pretty home—no matter how homely—still I felt it was better to have her in Queen Anne Street than not at all, and so fortified with many good wishes, I returned to London, and sought that interview in Devonshire Place

which was, as I erroneously imagined, to decide my fate.

In this I chanced, however, to be mistaken ; Sir Humphrey—or to speak more correctly, Lady Surry—for it was she who made every bullet which the old baronet fired—said neither no nor yes. I was not objected to on the score of either birth or fortune—but Rose was young—too young to enter into any engagement involving the whole of her future happiness. At the end of, say two years, I had permission to name the subject again, meantime I was not to see her clandestinely, neither were we to correspond.

How I rebelled against these conditions it is needless to tell. I prayed, I entreated, but I might as well have prayed and entreated a statue as Lady Surry ; and Sir Humphrey, now rapidly falling into poor health, was but a mere tool in the hands of his wife.

“ It is mamma—it is all mamma,” said

Rose, at the parting interview which Lady Surry graciously permitted us to have at Old Court ; “ but never mind, Tom, the two years will not be very long in passing. Think of all the years we have known each other already, and if I am not to see you I shall see Joan, and if I am not to write I will send you messages through her.”

And so we kissed and separated ; and I went back to London, and worked harder than ever at my profession ; and although Mr. Sherlock was cool for a little time, still he soon relented, and put what briefs he could in my hands.

I know now he believed the Surry alliance would never come to anything. I know now Lady Surry merely entertained my proposals to the slight extent I have related, to the end that if no better suitor offered, Rose, in the event of her father’s death, might not be left unprovided for. But at the time I was in blessed ignorance of everything, save the fact that when two years had expired

I should be free to speak again, and, as I hoped, to good purpose.

“If I can only get employed in some great case,” I thought, “my fortune is made.” But though great cases came, and were tried, and caused a noise in the world, my name never figured as counsel for either side.

I was young, I was almost unknown —there were plenty of abler men in the field—yet I did not despair. What though the fire of fortune was not yet kindled on my hearth — love still kept my heart warm — hope still sustained me.

If the path to success were rough and tedious, I felt, nevertheless, that I was treading it ; and in my chambers, where I sat all alone night after night, eschewing company, and studying harder than man, I think, ever worked before, I had sweet visions of the fame and wealth which were to crown my endeavours. Fame I only then desired, to

gain Rose for me—wealth I only longed for, that I might keep her like a queen—my love.

And so a year passed, and my probation was twelve months nearer its close.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOAN'S LOVER.

IN the many letters which Joan found time to write to me during that year—and especially towards the close of it—there occurred so frequently the name of a certain Walter Surry, that, at length becoming curious on the subject, and also slightly jealous, I asked my sister to favour me with some information concerning the gentleman in question, and also how it happened that he seemed to be so much in the neighbourhood, and so constantly with Rose.

By the next possible post Joan's answer came, "*You need not be at all uneasy about*

Rose,” she italicised; “ *Rose* is devoted to you; would never think of any one else; and Mr. Walter Surry only cares for her as a cousin.”

“ Then I suppose he cares for you not as a cousin,” I suggested in reply; but to this there came no answer. From that day Joan mentioned his name as seldom as possible, and, putting the two things together, I gathered that at last my sister was “ hit,” and that Mrs. Graham would probably ere long have good reasons for believing the “ Luttrells were,” to quote her favourite expression, “ going to hold up their heads again, and be heard of once more in the world.”

But I kept Joan’s secret as she had kept mine, and waited patiently for results.

Walter Surry was the only son of that Gilbert to whom Sir Geoffry left Grayborough Castle, and the estates and lands thereunto appertaining, which were valuable; together with the expression of a hope,

which proved abortive, that eventually Gilbert would succeed to the title.

Gilbert did not succeed ; he died within a very short time after his brother, and the estates and prospective title devolved consequently upon his only child, Walter, then a boy about my own age.

During his minority Grayborough Castle was left unoccupied, but now, after some years of foreign travel, Walter had taken up his abode there, and received much goodly company, his parties being matronized by his mother—a woman still handsome, Joan informed me, and very different indeed from Lady Surry.

Which, being translated, meant that Joan considered Mrs. Surry as agreeable as she thought Lady Surry the reverse.

To two of the balls which were given at Grayborough Joan was invited, and she sent me glowing accounts of the splendour of the house and the beauty of the ladies—of the kindness which had been shown to her

and my father, and the exceeding grace with which Walter Surry went through a quadrille.

What was there that man could not do better than any one else, according to Joan's report? He could ride, shoot, skate, sing, dance in a more perfect manner than man ever did before. "My duets never sounded the same until Mr. Surry sang the second with me." "I have just returned from a long ride with Rose and Mr. Surry. Rose was afraid to gallop—but he and I had *such* a race over Wildmoor Common," and so forth. Clearly the hero had come, and Joan's heart was gone irrecoverably.

Although at first I could scarcely believe that she had made so mighty a conquest, yet, remembering her rare beauty, I did not as time went on feel astonished at the affair.

Walter Surry, though young, had nevertheless probably seen enough of the world to disgust him with fashionable ladies; and the originality, talent, and simplicity which

distinguished Joan had no doubt attracted him towards her.

To me, of course, it appeared strange that any man should care for Joan when Rose was present, but I adopted my sister's view of the affair without question, remembering her wonderful faculty of penetration, and rested content, resolving, however, that when I went down to Crommingford for my summer holiday I would try whether, if no actual engagement existed between them, Mr. Surry could not be brought to the point.

Spite of my own delay and shyness in making my declaration, I always distrusted a man who in love matters hung fire, and I felt vaguely uneasy as letter after letter arrived from Joan and made no mention of his having said anything particular.

“If he be playing with her it will break Joan's heart,” I thought, and by way of warning, I just ventured in a postscript to ask if Mr. Surry were anything of a flirt.

In answer to that question I received a

manuscript—for I cannot call it a letter—which I would now reproduce, were sufficient space at command for the purpose.

Therein Joan recounted all the acts of the Surrys since time immemorial, and there was no word in all that chronicle of the baronets of Graysborough concerning a jilted or heart-broken woman.

Grand men were the Surrys, according to Joan's report—noble they had been since the beginning—even poor Sir Humphrey did his best to make a detestable wife happy, and what, then, could I mean by my question?

Replying to which appeal I said I had meant nothing, and Joan was pleased graciously to receive my statement as perfectly and undeniably true.

“But you will see him when you come down, Tom,” she remarked, just as if the sight of Walter Surry were likely to afford the slightest pleasure to me.

It wanted but a week or so to the time

I had arranged to leave London, and go for my long annual visit to Crommingford, when in the midst of the bright sunshiny weather, I heard the first growl of the storm that soon burst over us.

There came a rumour one morning to the effect that the great Indian house of Hollington, Carr, Byrne and Co. had stopped ; and I, knowing a considerable portion of Mrs. Graham's fortune had been left in that establishment, walked down to the city in order to satisfy myself there was nothing really in the report.

Of course all sorts of stories were afloat. Some said Hollingtons were good as the Bank of England ; others that Hollingtons had long been shaky ; some that the report would be contradicted in the next day's *Times* ; some that the ruin would be found to be more complete and wide-spread than people at all imagined.

Of course the prophets of evil were right—there rarely is smoke without fire—

and next day, in the money article, appeared a formal notice of the failure of that well-known firm.

At first I hardly grasped the full import of the announcement. Indeed I scarcely knew enough of Mrs. Graham's concerns to be aware that the bulk of her large fortune had gone down with Hollington's ship, and I shall never forget the sick heavy misery that oppressed me when, seated in Queen Anne Street, my relation, with tears and lamentations, declared she was a beggar—that she might as well go to the workhouse at once—that of course everything now was ended between Rose Surry and me, that she could do nothing for herself, and consequently nothing for me, on whose advancement she had set her heart.

I sat there and listened—sat there in the midst of her curiosities, her carved idols from India, her knick-knacks from China, her shells, her figures, her japanned work and bon-bon boxes, her ancient furniture—

dimly comprehending a crisis had come, that the last air palace of my erection was vanishing like its predecessors.

In my selfishness, at first I had scarcely a thought to spare for the poor old woman to whom money, and the things money could buy, had always seemed so precious—who had valued success so highly, and who now sat wringing her yellow wizened hands, and repeating that she would have to go to the workhouse, for there would never be a penny saved.

And there never was ; but with the few thousands she still possessed, and which had happily been invested in the funds, I eventually purchased an annuity that enabled her to keep on the house in Queen Anne Street, and to live there without any perceptible diminution of stateliness and pretension.

To do her justice, she fought against my advice, and would have left her home to take up her abode in a smaller house, so

that the principal she still retained might come to me at her decease, but I insisted on having my own way, and after she had made her unselfish offer, I think the old lady was rather glad to keep the goods the gods sent her, and to take at the same time immense credit for her proposed generosity.

All this, however, is in advance of my story, for on the fine summer's morning when I heard all she had to say, I do not think I could have suggested a plan for her future support, had any one told me I should be hung if I failed to strike one out. I could think of nothing, feel nothing but Rose, and the fact that the prospective fortune which had exercised so large an influence in persuading Lady Surry to listen to my proposals, was lost, lost hopelessly, needlessly.

True it may be said I was no worse off than in the days when, standing under the apple trees, I told my love tale; but I was just this much worse, I had led Sir Hum-

phrey to think I stood on a certain worldly equality with his daughter, with good prospects, and every chance of eventually attaining to a good position and standing in life. I had not said, "I have nothing but my profession," but I had said, "I have every chance of rising at the bar, and in addition, Mrs. Graham will make an immediate settlement on my wife, and leave me the bulk of her fortune at her death."

And now, after a year, I was not a step nearer legal success, so far as an outsider could judge, and I was minus the fortune, and Rose was twelvemonths older.

I thought I should go mad as all this swept through and through my brain, keeping a sort of time and measure to the poor ruined woman's senseless lamentation. Once the notion of going quietly down to Old Court, before the news had travelled there that the failure of Hollingtons involved my aunt's fortune, and persuading Rose to elope, crossed my mind, but, alas ! the days we lived in

were not those in which I could carry off my beloved to Gretna in a chaise and four.

And supposing they had been, and that I had carried her off, and found money to pay the expenses of the journey, and the blacksmith for his services, and the other incidental matters which no doubt made a marriage even at Gretna as uncomfortable an affair as it usually proves in England, how was I to earn a sufficient income to take that inevitable stucco and lath and plaster villa before alluded to, and furnish it, and pay servants' wages, and the baker and the butcher and the grocer and the milkman, to say nothing of other tradesmen and tax-collectors.

The money question seemed for a time to have lain comparatively quiet, and behold now in a moment was its venomous head upreared again, its forked tongue spitting poison at me all the while Mrs. Graham recited her dirge.

“There is nothing for me but the work-

house, and you will have to give up Rose."

Yes, I knew that—knew it without her telling me. It was my bounden duty, having toiled for a year vainly, and seeing the end more remote than ever, to relinquish the love of my life. If they would only grant me another year, I thought—if only—but I knew Lady Surry too well even for hope to deceive me; and I went down to Crommingford a dejected and heart-broken man.

There, fresh troubles awaited me. Affairs had latterly not been going well either at the mills or about the farm. With no one except Joan to help (for the only one of my brothers who was old enough to prove of much assistance, had neither sufficient brains nor sufficient steadiness to drop into the place I had, unfortunately, left vacant), things could scarcely be properly attended to; and besides, for two previous years there had been bad crops, and milling had

barely paid its own expenses. As if this were not enough, that very spring a disease had broken out amongst our cattle, and carried off the best of all the milch cows; and when affairs were at the very worst, Mr. Reemes died, and his heir was already demanding the re-payment of that two thousand pounds, with interest, which had for three years fallen, not totally, but a little, behind.

“I was, indeed, going to ask Mrs. Graham for assistance,” said my father; “but when your letter arrived, I had to abandon that idea, and look our position in the face; and having looked at it, Tom, and considering that if I were to die, there is no one to take the management, I think we had better sell off everything, pay our debts, and then—”

“Then what, father?” I asked.

“There will be, perhaps, something left,” he answered; “enough till the younger ones get up a little, and the boys must work; they will never learn to work here,

or to be good for anything but strolling about the fields, setting snares, and getting into mischief."

"I wish I had stayed!" I broke out, passionately—"I wish I had never gone away; I am of no use—none at all."

"Patience," he said; "it is not of what you are now, but of what you will be, Tom, you should think."

And, not to pain him further, I remained silent, though my heart was so full of grief, and disappointment, and regret, and anger, I could have cursed the hour in which I left my home, and went away to wander after the pot of gold, I had never yet touched, save in my dreams—and that I felt at that moment I should never touch, any more than I should find the end of that rainbow arch where, in nursery tales, the pot of gold is supposed to lie concealed.

At Old Court my interview terminated as might have been supposed. Sir Humphrey was heartily sorry, and, but for his wife,

would, I think, have conceded the year I prayed for in which to try my fortune.

It was my own year, after all, I asked, the second of the two originally granted ; but then, as Lady Surry remarked when I reminded her of that fact, the circumstances under which this second year was granted were now changed, as much as my prospects.

She could not contemplate a marriage for her daughter where there was neither money, nor ever the likelihood of money. Although Rose was not accustomed to great affluence, she had from her infancy been surrounded by every comfort ; and she put it to me—having so bitterly the whip hand, Lady Surry could afford to be reasonable and temperate—whether there were even the most remote chance of my being ever able to support a wife—unless, indeed, she had a large fortune of her own—in the style in which she, Lady Surry, was confident I should wish ?

“Sir Humphrey’s opinion was identical with her own,” Lady Surry proceeded. “They admired the candour with which I at once informed them of my altered fortunes, and they quite agreed with what was evidently my own conviction, namely, that the whole affair ought now to be as if it had never been.”

“As if it had never been,” I repeated, while I walked stupidly homeward. “I wonder if Lady Surry knew what she meant herself when she uttered that sentence.”

I asked if I might see Rose once more, but Lady Surry thought it would be better not, that leave-taking could only distress the poor child needlessly. She was sure (there were so many things she was sure, and certain, and confident of, during that interview) my great love for Rose would make me wish to spare her pain and sorrow.

It had better be by letter, if at all, Lady Surry suggested, and I agreed to this, but sent my letter to Grayborough, at which

place I ascertained from Joan, Rose was staying. Lady Surry had not, with all her certainty, bargained for that move on my part, or I am greatly mistaken.

Before I left Crommingford, however, I saw Rose once, quite by accident. She was riding, not with Mr. Surry, but with an older and a handsomer man, and my jealous eye noted that he leant over towards her, and was talking earnestly as they drew near to me. They had evidently dropped behind a riding party which I met half a mile earlier, and he seemed to be availing himself of his opportunities.

“So be it,” I thought, in my anger; “what can it matter to me?” and I would have let her pass without even a sign that I saw her, but suddenly checking her horse, she turned and followed.

“Tom!” I fancy her companion would have given a year’s rental to have heard her speak his name in that tone. “Tom, do you not know me?”

“Know you!” I repeated; “but you must remember it is to be all over between us—I am no better than a beggar, and you—”

“I never thought about the money, Tom,” she answered; “you got my letter telling you so, did you not? I can never care for anyone else—I will wait for you till you are a great man—till I am a hundred”—and the dear hand fell on my shoulder, and she stooped over her saddle till her face almost touched mine.

“That gentleman, Rose,” I suggested, warningly.

“I hate him!” she said vehemently, “I love no one but you, and I will love no one else, let them say or do what they like. If Mr. Lovell Allen choose to go and tell mamma, he can do so. Oh, Tom, I am so wretched!” and her eyes filled with tears. “I wish I were a child again, and could run away and hide from it all.”

“Rose,” I began, steadily enough, “I

have promised your father and mother to hold no further communication with you without their consent, but, darling, I shall not quite despair if only you will do one thing for me—marry no one else till after Christmas twelvemonth. If you see me in the church when you are decking it on Christmas-Eve, you will know I mean to speak to Sir Humphrey again; if not, you will understand, not that I love you less, but that I have tried to win you for the second time, and failed."

"I shall be there," she answered, "if we are in England; if not, I will manage to let you know—only it is such a long time—"

"Yes; but I have such a great deal to do in it," I murmured, and then the little fingers closed on mine, and we parted.

CHAPTER IX.

SUCCESS.

I suppose if any man could review all the events of his past life from the top of that hill of age, whereon he is mythically supposed at a certain period of his existence to sit down and rest, there is not a single act in the whole drama which, were the power given to him, he would play again in the same manner.

All we can say about the steps we took, the paths we selected, is that to our then judgment, those steps and those paths seemed the best that presented themselves; but then we will probably add in the next

breath, "more is the pity that they should have seemed so, since they unquestionably led to evil." Now it was an evil I am sure for my father to give up his land and sell off everything; but it seemed to me a good thing at the time for him to clear himself from worry—as though any human lot is ever free from worry.

It was like tearing an old tree up from the ground to try and transplant him, but the transplanting was effected nevertheless. As for my mother she liked the idea of returning to London, though she disliked the reality much more afterwards, and so far as the children went, they were wild with delight and non-comprehension.

Joan, and I, and my father were the three who felt the moving most, each one of us perhaps for a different reason, but all possibly with equal keenness.

We talked about the dreariness of exchanging our pretty place for stuffy London lodgings, but we knew it was not so much

the change of house or home which affected us, but rather the severance of all old ties—the impossibility of ever in the future reuniting those connecting links between the present and the past which we were then in our blindness wrenching asunder.

By reason of a merciful foresight, Joan coming to town with me in order to prepare some place wherein our people might lay their heads, imagined how it would be, and entreated me to take not merely lodgings but some quiet house, with a little land, to which a portion of our stock might be removed.

“London would kill papa now,” Joan said, “let us have a little place near it anywhere; one that I can manage, where they can go when they are tired of this, and the children want a run;” so as she said, it was, and I secured a small cottage surrounded by about ten acres of land, near Southgate, at a really low rent.

“If the worst come to the worst,” Joan

explained, “we can almost feed the children off the land; I do not mean by putting the darlings out to graze,” she added, “but by managing and contriving.”

Ah! Joan, though you were not my wife, nor for that matter the wife of anybody in those days, how often I have risen up at that country cottage and called you blessed, for if you had not been what you were, how could we ever have even with my poor help kept our brothers and sisters as we did, and cast the sunshine of easy contentment over the evening days of those who had been so good to us in the helpless years gone by.

It puzzles me sometimes now, Joan, how you have managed so to adapt yourself to different means and a different station—When I see you driving in your carriage—behold you entering your box at the opera, and hear you issuing your orders—to every one excepting me, even in the way you speak to your husband, there is unconsciously a

tone of command in your voice—I cannot but wonder at the adaptability and versatility of your sex. You never made a sixpence really in your life, and I have a few—but yet I could no more go in for your grand manner than I could fly. I cannot help thanking the splendid creature in plush, who condescends to take charge of my over-coat when I have luncheon with you *tête-à-tête* in St. James's Square, and how you can order and send him about as you do, baffles my comprehension.

But then perhaps the battered sun-bonnet and the stolen cherries are less present memories with you than with me.

The faculty of forgetfulness is as great as prescience with your sex, my dear—happily.

On me devolved the trial of seeing the last of our dear old home. I went down for the auction. I paid off the bill of sale; I reserved the few things we required, the cattle we desired to keep—further, I retained an old man who had been in our

employment for years, to take charge of the live stock to their new home, and "if you would like to stay with them, Sam, you can," I added; hearing which, Sam, who had neither chick nor child, wife nor mother, went straight away, and, disposing of his few household gods, adopted ours, and remained one of us till his death.

These are all simple records, friends—but this professes to be none other than a simple story—too simple, I fear, to find favour save with the few who like to hear better about still life, and the untragical existences most of us lead, than to read concerning nature's storms, and the violent crimes and passions of our humanity.

In the plot of a modern Macbeth, of what use could Sam seem, save to carry the poisoned bowl, or sharpen the fine Damascus steel? Yet in our poor lives he filled in a not unimportant part.

He carried "home" with him to London. No place would have seemed one to us with-

out that familiar presence. No cow could have calved properly, no sow farrowed, no hen been set, without Sam's assistance and knowledge; and on my way between Colney Hatch Station and Southgate, whither each Saturday I drove in a pony cart belonging to the small farm, drawn by a pony which, for speed and beauty, could not, though I say it, have been matched in the county of Middlesex, Sam was wont to entertain me with stories of the cattle, the fowls, the dogs, the family, that filled me, coming as I did each week from the midst of strangers, with an unspeakable delight.

But all this time I am wandering away from Crommingford, where the neighbours were very kind, and bought up everything at good prices—God bless them!—for those prices made all the difference to us. As I have said, I satisfied the bill of sale, and, as I have not said, I paid all our debts, small and big; and then I gave up the place, walking away from it by a long,

green, back avenue, which led neither to nor from anywhere in particular, feeling, as I passed each well-remembered spot, that I should never again return to the haunts of my boyhood.

I had some reason then to suppose that at a future time that neighbourhood would retain its charms, for hope, as I told Rose, was not quite dead within me ; but yet, as I closed the wicket gate of the unused entrance I have mentioned, and turned back for one last look over the familiar scene, I *knew* I should see the old homestead, with the horses being brought back after the day's labour, no more for ever.

And I never have, and I feel confident I never shall.

It did not turn out so badly as might have been anticipated, and this fact first induced me to think that my father—that we all might have been wrong. When, after a man is sold up, he proves considerably more than solvent, it is difficult to imagine why

such a breaking-up was ever deemed expedient. Yet there are more bankrupts than those, who feel money dropping from their pockets faster than they can shovel it in—men who do not fail because money is difficult, or credit an impossibility, but merely because life, at the best, not being an easy struggle—when health begins to fail and energy to subside—they weary and sicken of the battle.

They want peace on any terms ; they care little who wins, so long as they are permitted to lay down their arms—and thus it proved with my father. He asserted the fight had been too much for him, and he was glad to have done with grim debt and grimmer difficulty, and come even to London lodgings, which he subsequently exchanged, with something more than pleasure, for the cottage previously mentioned, whither I had sent some of the household stuffs, and a few familiar chairs and tables that would, I fancied, make

the new place seem a little like an old home.

Meantime, I took to literature—that usual resource for poor briefless men—and earned money. I did not earn much; but visions of fabulous wealth, which was to be the proceeds of a certain work on which I was then engaged, floated before me, making the prosaic two guineas I had once approved of, seem like dross in my eyes.

Were that work—it was one of fiction—to appear now, I could make quite enough out of it to live on for a year; but the unhappy thing is, I could not write it now. One cannot write a good novel twice any more than one can cut an eye-tooth; and, unfortunately, the time of life at which one does cut an eye-tooth is not usually considered favourable to mature judgment—and so one gets paid accordingly for one's first novel, only one cannot sell that first novel a second time, which seems a hardship.

Joan, my sole confidante, took occasion,

when Rose was staying at Grayborough, to inform her of the fact of my authorship, and numerous letters on the subject were interchanged between the pair.

It was only from Grayborough Rose could write, Joan informed me, since Lady Surry had tabooed their correspondence.

“Rose does not care, however, so long as her mamma does not know,” Joan remarked—as I have before observed, my angel’s views on the score of strict morality were feminine and somewhat oblique,—“and Lady Surry never told me not to write to her, so I shall as long as I can.”

But the correspondence, like Rose’s visits to Grayborough, was broken off by another continental tour, in which Rose took part, and then I was utterly disconsolate—more especially after one day when I said to my sister,

“Do you ever hear now from Mr. Surry, Joan?” and she suddenly broke out crying.

“Never, Tom, never. I am afraid I made a great mistake, and that it was Rose after all.”

Rose after all—ah! well, love may be a very fine passion, but it is also a very selfish one, for I gave scarcely a thought to Joan's trouble as I turned away in order to contemplate that fresh trouble of my own. Rose, after all, was weak, and he was with her continually—he so clever and rich, so handsome, so capable of winning love, while I—I who loved her as man never loved, was forced to stand out in the cold, bearing all this, and, like some poor wretch battling with the rigour of a snow-storm, to see only at a distance the fires blazing, near which other men could sit enjoying the bright glow of the pine logs piled high on the once familiar hearth.

And yet still I never then quite despaired. I felt strong in myself—felt success might yet be on the cards for me. Already I was beginning to be recognised—time had commenced its work, which, though very slow, is very sure, and if I had not got any first-rate briefs, at least solicitors, some of them

shrewd enough in their generation, were aware of my existence.

People began to speak to me—people I knew, who, though I recognised them well enough, had hitherto regarded me as a stranger and an outsider.

I had been blest with some small retainers, I was becoming well known in the courts. The woman who kept the stall by the gate which leads from Chancery Lane, away towards Lincoln's-Inn Fields, had learnt to know me; I occasionally received an invitation to dinner from other men than Mr. Sherlock; Dick Tullett, who was even then rising to eminence, meeting me one day in the street, had not disdained to ask me to partake of boiled mutton with him (so his modesty put it) on the following day, and I went and ate the mutton, which turned out to be venison, sent by one of his patrons, and was charmed, as may well be imagined, with Dick and his surroundings.

After the venison business, however, I

lacked courage to invite Dick's company to a mutton chop and pints of the best Burton, which hesitation I have reason to believe Dick ascribed to pride on my part, believing I earned a fabulous income on the 'Weekly Jupiter,' the actual fact being I felt afraid of Dick, who knew nobody under a lord, and talked about wines as if he had been weaned on them. I have tried experiments since upon Dick, and find he knows no more about wines than my youngest daughter, who, if I were writing at home at this moment instead of in my chambers, would toddle up to me, and taking the pen out of my hand, say, "You shall write no more, pa," which mandate I always, since the world is altered and parents now honour their children, dutifully obey.

Time still went on as has been before stated. It is a way time has, though sometimes when very miserable one feels almost inclined to doubt the fact; and summer came again, and another autumn followed,

and though I thought I was “getting on” really, yet apparently matters with me remained *in statu quo*.

I had nothing to take in my hand, so to speak, and show Sir Humphrey and Lady Surry. My means were still inadequate to maintain a wife properly, and ere long it seemed probable I should have to assist my father in maintaining his family.

The great brief might come or it might never come—and if it did another might never follow. My own reason was all on the Surry side of the question, but my feeling was all on my own. Had they given me a hope of Rose I felt as though I could have conquered fate—but then in those days when I had a hope of Rose I had not conquered fate—the victory had been quite the other way—alas ! for me.

“The Surrys are in London,” Joan remarked one morning in that autumn, to which allusion has been made, “I saw Rose and her mother driving in the park

yesterday, with Mrs. Surry. Rose looked pale and worn."

It was in my chambers this interview took place, and when Joan ceased speaking I made no reply, only turned over the scattered papers, putting them mechanically in order, one on the top of another.

"What did you say, Tom," asked my sister, after waiting patiently for about a minute.

"I said nothing," I replied.

"Then why did you say nothing?" she retorted. "I tell you Rose—our Rose—is in London, and you stand there like a stock or a stone, answering never a word. Has this not gone on long enough, Tom?" she asked passionately. Ah! Joan, I do not believe that passion was evinced altogether in my interest. "Are you not going to make an effort to see her, to keep her for yourself?"

"I promised——," I was beginning, when Joan interrupted with—

“Then unpromise—you should never have done anything so ridiculous and quixotic as to pledge yourself to adopt any course. Write to Sir Humphrey, and give him fair warning you mean to use every means to win his daughter. The girl is breaking her heart for you. I have no patience with men,” my sister finished. “If I were a man, and a girl loved me as Rose loves you, I would have her, spite of all the parents in England.”

“No, Joan, you would not,” I replied; “not if you loved her; rather, if you felt you had no prospect but poverty, no chance of maintaining her in anything like the comfort to which she had been accustomed, you would say, ‘God grant she may forget and leave the burden to be borne by me.’”

“Then why did you ask her to wait for you till Christmas next?”

“Because I was mad,” I replied, “because experience had not taught me—because I believed in myself, and thought I was strong

enough to accomplish anything by means of my own cleverness. I see now my mistake—I see, without extraneous help, a professional man can do very little to push his way. Oh! Joan," I added, speaking out what had often lately filled my heart, "I wish I had never left the farm, never accepted Mrs. Graham's offer. I used to count the hours till I should get away and begin my new career—but it was all a mistake. I could have done well for myself and all of us, with your help, had I remained there. I should have been near Rose, and in that case——"

"Nothing would ever have changed her," Joan finished, as I paused, "but as matters stand, you have left the field open for her cousin. You know Rose well enough—so long as she has anybody to stand near and protect her, she could be brave as I am, but as things are, how can you expect her to be firm? She is everlastingly with Walter Surry and his mother, and it is a match you may be posi-

tive Lady Surry would like, and you have pledged yourself not to write to or see her, and there can be no doubt but that either they are intercepting her letters, or that she is changed, for it is more than six months since I had even a line from her, she who used to write to me two and three times a week."

"Joan," I said, "would you have me ask Rose to spend all the best years of her life waiting for a man who may never be able to marry her after all?"

"There is no use in talking to you, Tom," she answered; "I believe, after all, you are fond of that hateful Miss Sherlock. I saw you walking down Piccadilly with her yesterday. Yes, you may well colour; I did see you, though you were too much occupied to notice me. If you lose Rose I shall not pity you one morsel. It would not surprise me any day to see an account of her marriage in the paper."

"It would surprise me greatly," I answered; but even while I spoke my conscience accused me of falsehood.

I knew I should not be surprised—I knew I should have no right to feel so. And yet, spite of this knowledge, I hoped on, believing in my darling's constancy, and only really dreading the coming of that Christmas-Eve when I had told her she would understand by my presence or absence how it was to be between us in the future.

And yet what right had I any longer to thrust my wretched prospects between her and fortune? For any one, even for my Rose, Walter Surry, from a pecuniary point of view, was an excellent match; further, according to Joan, this paragon had been endowed by Heaven with every gentlemanly grace and manly virtue. True, he had led Joan astray as regarded his feelings towards her; but I could well understand that, if he loved Rose, he would like Joan for Rose's sake, and comprehend, with his knowledge of the world, that the best way to "destroy her attachment for me was to patronise my family, and afford her ample opportunities

for contrasting the narrow means of our poor home with the glories of Grayborough.

Afterwards I knew in all this I had made a mistake, and that at the time he was perfectly unconscious I was an object of the slightest interest to Rose, or Rose to me; but it is difficult at any period of one's life to understand that one's actual existence is a matter of the supremest indifference to a great many people on earth, and this is doubly difficult to realise when one first starts in the race, and being new to the course, fancies that every man's eye is on one, noting the result.

There is one thing I can honestly say, however—namely, that if I were an object of indifference to Walter Surry, he was by no means an object of indifference to me. I thought of him waking, I dreamed of him sleeping, and always in my dreams he seemed to me mixed up with that Lovell Allen, of whom Rose had spoken so bitterly. Sometimes the one changed into the other—

sometimes I confused Lovell Allen's face with that of Walter Surry ; but always those two men were associated in my mind together, and have remained so associated ever since.

As Christmas drew near, my nights grew more disturbed, my days more restless ; I could attend to nothing properly ; the little work I had was neglected ; I could not write, I could not read ; the very printer's devils I had once been so rejoiced to welcome, whom I had requested with such courtesy to seat themselves in my vestibule whilst I completed an article, and rewarded with numerous sixpences for dropping off to sleep during their stay, were now dismissed summarily and empty, both as regarded copy and gratuities.

When Mr. Sherlock's managing clerk called with a brief in some trumpery case that was to be tried at the Guildhall, I failed to receive him with those evidences of gratitude which he had come really to

regard as his due ; and never suspecting the cause of my indifference, he went back and told his employer he thought Mr. Luttrell must be getting on, for he did not seem to care about such small things now.

But in an hour, in a minute, everything was changed—green leaves budded from barren stems, flowers decked the fields—the sun poured his warmest beams into the room where I sat beside my wintry fire.

One day there came a brief—the brief of all others I could have desired. The great case of '*Aylesbury v. Montford and others*,' which filled the newspapers for weeks, and occupied public attention to an almost unheard of extent, was coming on for trial, and to my humble room—to my chambers in Staple's Inn—was sent a brief.

The leader on our side was Mr. Serjeant MacNeill, since raised to the peerage, and I was next to him.

Fortune had relented at last, the ball was at my foot, the tide had turned and might

bear my poor tossed bark to wealth and Rose Surry after all.

I never paused to inquire how it had come or why, but, like a giant refreshed, arose and faced once more the life I had but a few moments before thought not worth living—faced it as a man restored after long sickness to health looks out on the world with a new sense of its beauty, with a keener appreciation of its loveliness.

At what age, I wonder, does a man, so long as he has the chance of happiness stretching away before him, cease to be a fool. I was a fool that day when the brief in Aylesbury's case arrived. Already I saw retainers pouring in, and heard myself talking, the observed of all observers; already I prophetically beheld publishers offering me fabulous sums for my next new work; already wealth was mine—and fame.

It has all come since—all my soul then thirsted for—sufficient wealth, comparative fame, briefs more than I desire to see, such

celebrity, or shall we rather say notoriety, as is to be won by him who addresses his Lordship and an intelligent and enlightened jury. People great enough in their way, and high up in the social scale, like to see me at their dinner-tables, while my wife's basket is filled with "At Homes," and invitations to various excuses for bringing people together and making them uncomfortable. And yet, behold the end, my dear young friends ; after all, when you ask me for a story, I can find none so near my heart as that of my 'First Love,' for whose dear sake I gloried in that brief, for whose satisfaction I already mentally won the case, after a telling speech following that of Mr. Serjeant MacNeill.

I went to my poor aunt and told her success had come at last, whereupon the dear old creature burst into tears of mingled pride and affection, and told me I was the only thing she had to live for. I then journeyed to Southgate, and carried the good news thither.

Ah ! heaven, who on this earth would be lonely, if he could but know all the pleasures his success is capable of carrying to those who can love, but have no power of winning success for themselves. I cannot imagine anything so barren as victory, if the victor have to wear his laurels solitary amongst strangers, if he hath no kith nor kin to rejoice with him, to feel their hearts stirred when the thousands clap, and the crowd cheers ; when they behold him who is of their lineage, whose blood is identical with their own, bowing the hearts of the men of Israel as the heart of one man.

“There is one thing wanting,” Joan whispered, as she came with me to the door.

“On Christmas-Eve, please God,” I answered, and I went exulting out into the night.

But long ere Christmas-Eve it pleased God to stretch my dear father on a bed of sickness, and for days and days his life hung

by such a thread that, spite of my love and my longing, I could not leave his side.

He did not, of course, know where my heart was, and while he kept continually asking for Tom when I was out of the room, and holding my hand while I was in it, how could I leave, even to keep faith with her whom I loved better than father, or mother, or brother, or sister, loving each one and all of them no less the while?

But I sent a special messenger down to Old Court with a letter, and instructions to deliver it into Miss Surry's own hands, which he did, only it chanced to be into the hands not of Rose, but of another Miss Surry, who ordinarily resided in Devonshire Place, but who chanced then to be staying on a visit with her brother. This lady, after reading, carried the epistle to Lady Surry, and the pair agreed to keep its contents and its advent a secret from Rose—whom it would only, so they said, unsettle.

Long afterwards we knew this, when in

the future we came to compare notes—when Rose, sitting in this very room, told me how she had gone to the church, and watched and waited—waited even in the churchyard after every one else was gone—only to return home disappointed.

And they knew it, those women—knew the travail of her heart for one they had striven to make her believe unworthy—knew I was constant all the while—knew that then, just as tenderly and truly as when we stood in my father's orchard whispering our vows—I loved Rose, and Rose loved me.

CHAPTER X.

WHAT SUCCESS BROUGHT TO ME.

IT was the second week in the new year before I could get away, that is before my father was pronounced out of danger; and then I really ought not to have left, because I knew every moment of my time should, properly speaking, have been devoted—not to love—but to the great cause of '*Aylesbury v. Montford and others.*' To rest, however, any longer without seeing Rose, was, I felt, impossible. There had been a period during that weary probation when I turned my thoughts from her, and swore to myself I would forget my madness and my disap-

pointment; but now when hope had returned, when the past was again present, and the dream just capable of fulfilment, how could I longer refrain !

There was a hunger and a thirst on me to behold my darling. I could have cried aloud for delight when I found the early express speeding me onward. I talked to my fellow-passengers, I lent one old gentleman the *Times*, I gave another a share of my travelling-rug. I was amiable even concerning polities, and forbore from thrusting my conservative flag under the eyes of an unmitigated radical, who treated us to a dissertation on the then absorbing question of the day.

What did I care about the frost and snow—I liked them. There was a bracing exhilaration in the air; the wind was crisp and fresh. So much of my life had lately been spent in a sick-room, and a sick-house, that I felt like a prisoner let loose, while speeding away to Crommingford.

The station was nearly a mile from the village, and of course there was no vehicle of any kind awaiting the arrival of the train; so I left my bag at the station, with direction that it should be forwarded to the 'Green Man and Still,' by one of the porters, and pursued my way on foot to that unambitious hostelry.

Everywhere the frozen snow lay thick. It sparkled on the leaves of the holly in the hedges; it covered the fields; it clothed the upper portion of each elm bough. But the sun shone brightly, and the birds twittered, and the ground was crisp and firm below my tread; and it seemed to me as though my boyhood, and the hopes and the purposes thereof, had returned, while I walked rapidly towards the village.

Before I reached it, there fell upon my ears the sound of the bells I remembered so well, ringing for some village wedding; and when I came in sight of the church, I saw that the graveyard was full of idlers, while

that on the green were collected knots of persons, who seemed gathered to see the bridal.

“Happy may they be,” I thought to myself; but at that very moment I caught sight of three or four carriages drawn up under the lime trees near the church gate, and why, I knew not, I never could tell, my heart gave first a great bound of fear, and then seemed as suddenly to stand still.

“You seem to be very merry at Crommingford to-day, my friend,” I said to an old labourer whom I passed, and who was standing like the rest, to see the show. How I ever got the words out, I cannot tell, for my tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of my mouth. I was parched like one who had been wandering through some arid desert.

“Yes, sir; it is our young lady’s wedding day, and there are to be great doings at the Court to-night, the like of which have never been known in these parts.”

“Young lady—Court,” I repeated in my agony.

“Yes, sir, Miss Surry is marrying her cousin ; and a bullock is to be roasted whole at Old Court.”

I pushed him on one side, and ran on.

Had I reached the church in time I knew now I should certainly have forbidden the wedding, interrupted the ceremony ; but as it was, just as I entered the porch the marriage party were sweeping into the vestry.

I saw people pressing round the bride, kissing, shaking hands, wishing her all happiness. I saw the bridegroom, tall, stately, exultant. I saw my treasure—mine, shrinking a little from the congratulations—white as her veil, pass to the book, where she signed her name, which was to be the same as wife as it had been as maiden ; and then feeling I could not stand without some support, I leaned up against the wall just within the church porch, and waited for her coming.

I did not mean to speak. I only intended that she, faithless, should see me faithful,

and I repented me afterwards that I had not fled—I did, oh ! Rose, my love.

After a long time, as it seemed to me, they came out, bride and bridegroom first ; she just touching his arm ; he bending down triumphantly, and looking so proud and so happy that I could have stricken him dead in my jealous hate.

But I shrank back from their sight ; if the ground had opened and swallowed me up I should have been glad, but as it did nothing of the sort I drew more and more away from the light to a corner under the organ loft stairs, where no eyes but hers could have beheld me.

Suddenly her face changed, and she dropped his arm. “ I see an old friend to whom I must speak,” I heard her say, and next moment the small white-gloved hand clasped mine, and there sounded in my ear the piteous moan,

“ Oh ! Tom, why did you not come before ? ”

Then looking in my face, like myself she grasped the truth. We had both been deceived—both duped—we knew it by intuition then, as we knew it of certainty afterwards.

“We must both try to bear it,” she went on. How brave these women, even the tenderest of them, are under the torture—perhaps the tenderer the braver. “We must both try to bear it. Good-bye, Tom dear!” And the little hand was withdrawn, and I saw her, whom I had carried in my arms—who should have been mine—mine—pass away through the door and down the path—his—

Further into the darkness I drew back, and when the last of the wedding party had defiled out, I crept after them into the daylight.

I did not attempt to follow them. I only stopped behind a monument and watched *her* returning the greeting of the villagers, while my heart seemed breaking.

I followed her white dress till she entered her husband's carriage, and I heard the cheer with which the crowd greeted the newly-married couple as they drove back to Old Court.

Then I emerged from my post of observation, and walking along a path which led in a contrary direction, struck off across the fields to walk anywhere away from *her* memory.

The whole aspect of nature seemed changed to me in a moment; it was no longer a bracing, inviting morning to my idea—the earth was covered with a frost, which had blighted flower and beauty—as in a moment flower and beauty had departed from my life.

It was in the early spring I had last trodden those field paths, unhappy in my prospects indeed, but yet seeing a life before me not destitute of hope; but now, oh! Lord, but now—success had come, and where was she for whom I alone desired success?

Where there had been verdure there lay snow; in lieu of leaf and promise were bare boughs and rotten twigs, while Rose, the only love of my life, could be, even in thought, mine no longer.

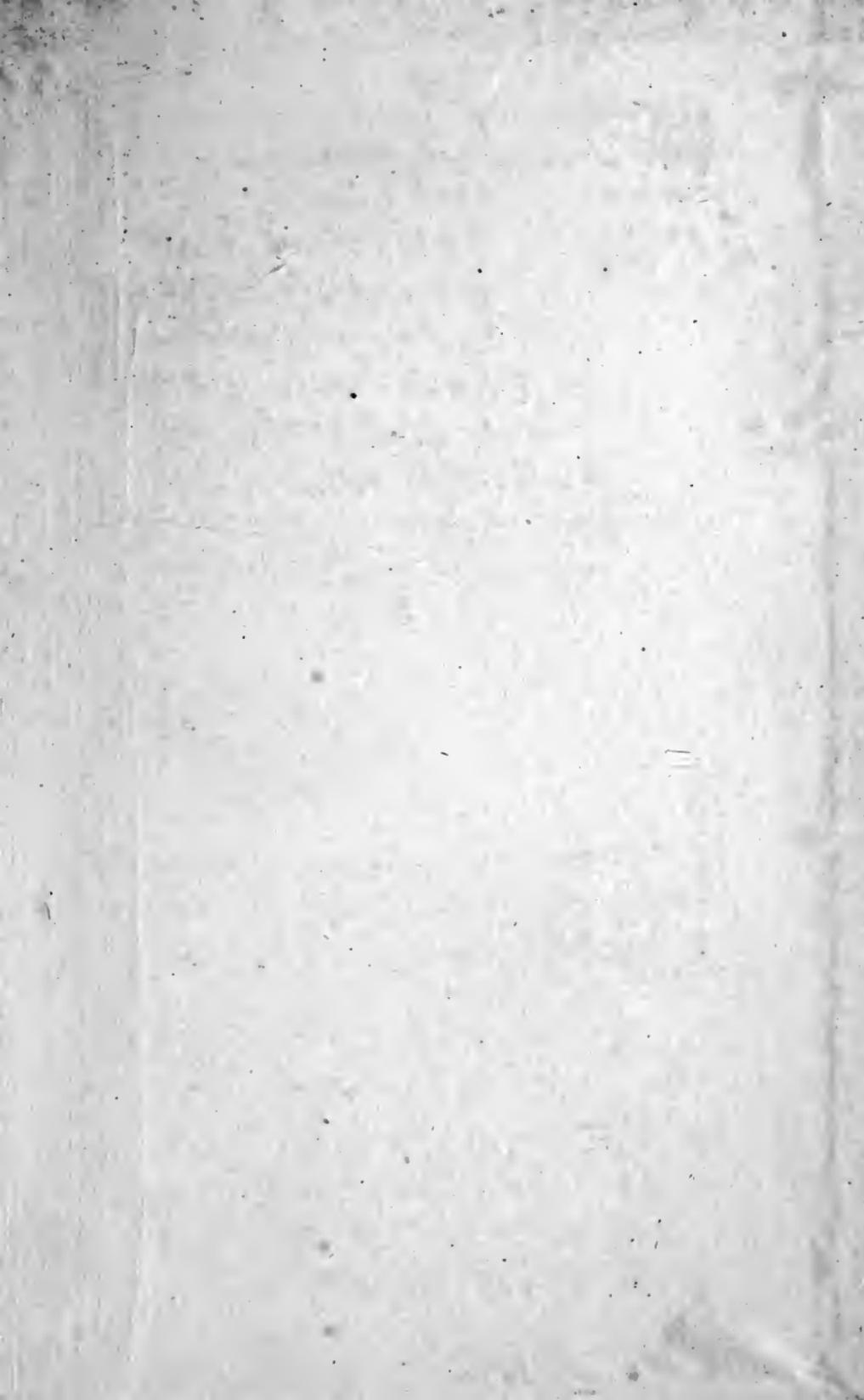
And so, thus far, my story is, told. So my first love passed away from my sight—the wife of another.

END OF VOL. II.









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